

## MY OWN RIVAL.

BY FENNO HAYES.

PERFECTION isolates. I had known this long before, and cared nothing; but the day that saw Louis Rivaux at my feet I comprehended the desolation of magnificence, the curse of a beauty so extreme as my own.

You think he was my lover. No, a thousand removes from that. I never had a lover, notwithstanding there had been many at my feet before him. But, I repeat, I never cared till this day, till I found out, listening to this man who begged no love of me, but only that he might make of me an idol unto himself, that I had a heart; and then how could I be an idol? For what idol ever had a heart, or cared for its worshipper?

He was more than eloquent, but alas! I remembered certain outbursts of his before Murillo's pictures in the art galleries of Rome, and recognized the parallel. He was on his knees before me. O, that he had risen to the level of my heart—instead—that his smooth flowing speech had tripped upon his tongue!

The nursery door must have been ajar. Anything serves Lulu for a cradle song. Bending, happy as any saint in high heaven, above her sleeping babe, she will yet sing so one might fancy her heart were breaking, if one did not know that singers, still less than poets, feel what they sing. At this moment there floated down the stairs, "Thou art so near, and yet so far." My soul has possessed her voice, I thought, looking down on Rivaux, whom I might have laid my hand upon as I sat—Rivaux, between whom and me there stretched immensity.

Still, I was tempted sore. Is not half a loaf better than no bread? Yet how is hunger helped by a stone? If I dared risk circumstance, disease, the pall of posses-

sion, there yet waited for me time, the iconoclast, from whom one may escape only by death's door. Ruin is less kind to loveliness in nature than in art—it denies it even the picturesque. The ugliest old women one sees have always been young beauties, I remembered, and the thought stung me to cry out a little sharply, at last, the words with which I had dallied so long, the question for which I knew his heart held but one answer.

"Wait," I said, interrupting him in the midst of his rapid tide of words. "Do you love me?"

"I adore you," he answered, looking up in my beautiful face, seeing that only, thinking of that only, as he spoke.

His tone, his words, clashed hollow and alien in my ears with a little Scotch lullaby, simple, and homely, and sweet, which Lulu now sang.

"Do you love me?" I said, again, with an emphasis so marked and bitter, that it roused him to comprehension of my meaning and himself.

He did not speak directly, and watching his face, I knew that I had judged him aright—he might, perhaps, be cruel, but he could not be untrue.

"It is not for you, Regina," he said, at last; "you do not need it. Love, the common love which man gives woman, embraces tenderness, and tenderness implies pity, though it be latent and undeveloped. Look," he continued, leading me before one of the mirrors with which the room was lined; "you are a goddess—you are perfection. Do you, then, demand tenderness? Do you inspire pity? No, love clasps at its own level, heart to heart, but it is thus for you, Regina," throwing himself again at my feet, and again uttering I know not what wild ravings of my beauty.

"Rise, Monsieur Rivaux," I said, smiling a little; "it is not worth so much supplication, that which it appears to me I can grant you at small cost to myself. Every one concedes your skill as an artist. Come, I will sit to you, and you shall have the portrait for your own. Perfection, as a woman, must soon decay—as a portrait, you may possess and preserve unscathed for a lifetime that which you so much admire in me."

"But, ah!" he said, a little confused at the turn I had given the affair, "did I not say you were a goddess rather than a woman?"

"Then I may not wed a mortal," I answered. "I must wait for my Olympian mate."

I spoke lightly, mockingly, for I was in an agony, now that I had fathomed exactly his feeling for me, lest he should suspect what had prompted me to demand of him if he loved me, lest he should guess what bitter longing possessed me for the very love above whose reach or need he had set me. If not mine love's tender sympathy, never for me the pity which stings worse than contempt, the compassion whose existence seems to be insult. I was more gay, more brilliant than he had ever seen me; I assumed that my "happy thought," as I laughingly termed it, had perfectly satisfied him, with an air so assured, so complacent and friendly, that it was impossible for him to remonstrate against this literal interpretation of his desires, or to urge with naturalness or persistency anything beyond this favor which I had offered him.

He left me, at length, a little bewildered, I could see, at both me and himself, and the outer door closed at once upon his retreating form, and opened to the incoming figure of Theo, into whose arms Lulu lightly sprang from the stairs, down which she had hastened on seeing him come up the walk.

"Ha! ha! little wife!" laughed Theo, kissing Lulu heartily. "One would think I had been a long journey. Has the child got his teeth? Does he walk or talk yet?"

"For shame, Theo," remonstrated Lulu. "I have a mind to punish you for laughing at me by not allowing you to see baby at all till to-morrow morning."

"And that would make twenty-four hours elapse since my beholding this won-

der of the nineteenth century. Monstrous woman! cruel tyrant!" mocked Theo. "It is thus I set you at defiance." And then I heard a little scrambling rush and pursuit across the hall, a laughing struggle, and afterward Theo's firm steps went up the stairs and to the nursery door a bit more slowly and heavily than usual, on account of Lulu's weight.

Some impulse made me follow. As I opened the door of the nursery I beheld Theo's great lion head bent above a pink mite of humanity that lay in the swinging cradle, while on the other side Lulu stood looking down on both with an expression of infinite satisfaction and content.

"Why did you marry Lulu, Theo?" I said, suddenly.

"Because I loved her, to be sure," he answered, promptly, taking at once the mite's mite of a hand and Lulu's into one of his broad palms.

"But why did you love her?" I pursued. "Not for her beauty?" I said, a little ironically, perhaps; but Lulu doesn't mind her looks—at least, not since she has had Theo.

"Not at all," said Theo, getting up and making me a grand bow. "If love were for beauty, I should be your slave instead of Lulu's husband. But beauty's only a fading flower," added Theo, not unwilling to pay me for my little thrust at Lulu.

"And not for her voice," I said, "for you don't know A sharp from B flat, and of all the world you are the only one who doesn't listen when she sings."

"No, not for her voice," he said, stealing his arm round Lulu's waist.

"What for, then?" I questioned.

"Because I did, because I do—that's all, and that's enough—the best reason in all the world for loving, the only reason that neither time nor circumstance can change or shake. Kiss me, Lulu."

I felt that I must fly. My eyes were strangely dim, and something choked in my throat, for at every word Theo uttered I realized anew the mockery of a marriage founded on the feelings with which my beautiful flesh had inspired Rivaux, the immeasurable distance between love and admiration, be it ever so enthusiastic. But how bitter is conviction against desire! How ravishingly, despairingly sweet seems love in others when to us denied! I could no longer contemplate it. I fled away to

solitude and the first tears which I remember. Happy Lulu, who, having nothing, yet had all! Miserable me, a queen who despised her kingdom, who would have given all the jewels in her sceptre for love's rose!

Rivaux was a Frenchman, versatile and imaginative. When he came on the morrow to give me my first sitting I could see that my idea had taken strong hold of his fancy, that the anticipated me whom he should paint already rivalled my living self in his artist soul. A strange pique and jealousy stirred in my heart; I would have retracted my offer, only that I feared any inconsistency of mine might possibly suggest to him its cause, so timid does one become who has aught to conceal.

But I had condemned myself to slow torture, to exquisite torment, as I sat before the man whom I loved with all my soul, to give to him my soulless image, and saw, day after day, the beautiful insensate thing upon the canvas absorb and satisfy him more completely. Unrecognized, unwooded, the woman watched as he painted the goddess, listening even as one might to the praises of a rival, to the raptures over form and coloring in which he indulged as his work progressed, my breathing lips thirsty for the kisses of a lover, while his brush lingered about the smiling mouth of the portrait as if loath to leave it.

At last the portrait was completed, and before it Rivaux stood with exactly the expression upon his face that I remembered it had worn on the day of his declaration to me. Ah me! how well, how cruelly, tauntingly well, had this substitution sufficed him!

"To-morrow," he said, more to himself than to me, without turning his eyes from the picture, "to-morrow I shall come to take it away, to take it with me, for I can never, never leave it behind."

"What?" I said, rising and stretching out my hands involuntarily, as if to stay him; but he did not notice, still absorbed in contemplating my image. "You are going away, Monsieur Rivaux? Where then?"

"Yes," he said, dreamily. "We are going away somewhere, over seas. I hardly know where we shall make port. My bride," laying his hand caressingly upon the canvas and smiling a little, "will not be difficult."

I slipped away and left him there before the picture, only too sure that he would never miss me, then, as in the future, when he should be "over seas," for all of me for which he cared his brush had obtained for him. But even in the bitter agony that surged over me at the thought that I should behold him no more, I did not regret that my beauty was to accompany him without my soul, for if I had learned more certainly any lesson in those hours while he painted me, it was that only love can satisfy love, that a wife wooed for beauty alone is but a mistress who must tremble at every moon that brings nearer age's withering breath, who must forever fear life's thousand accidents and chances.

Yet he was going away, whither I scarcely knew, nor for how long, and I loved him; I remembered that, and that only, when night came, night, which is friendly alone to the happy, whose shadows darken still more deeply shadowed hearts.

Sleep was long in coming to me, but I fell finally into the heavy slumber of exhaustion. Philosophers tell us that any estimation of the duration of time in dreams by the feelings or seeming events taking place therein is impossible, but surely it was hours that a mountain lay on my breast, that a monster's choking hand clutched at my throat. But I gasped and struggled into waking and reality at last.

The room was full of smoke, dense and blinding, and without its doors I heard a rush and crackling as of flame. I felt my way dizzily to the door that opened into hall, but already the staircases, front and back, were on fire, cutting off my escape.

My room communicated with that in which Rivaux had set up his easel, and thither I went and crouched down by the side of my portrait, as if that could give me some companionship in death, for in less than five minutes from my awakening I had comprehended that the house was on fire, that I had been forgotten, and that there was nothing left for me but to wait the coming of the fierce red-tongued fiend, that writhed itself at every moment nearer the door of the apartment in which I was. The smoke had nearly smothered me in my sleep, I suppose, for all my senses seemed dulled and stupefied, and I did not even think to go to a window and try to attract attention, so that I might escape, if,

perchance, help could be rendered me in any way from below.

"Ah me!" I murmured to my unconscious double; "we shall perish together, but you, at least, he will regret."

Ah, sad is death when it takes one beyond love's reach, but bitter and desolate indeed it seems to look forward to a grave that shall be watered by no tear. A grave! Should I have a grave ever, or would the four winds of heaven scatter my ashes whither they listed? A horror of death, of such annihilating, swift consuming death, of such sudden utter nothingness, seized upon me at this thought. I grovelled in agony and despair upon the floor; behind the picture, with my head buried in a pillow, to deaden as much as I might the ever louder rustling of the approaching flames.

Suddenly I became conscious of a noise at one of the windows, of a presence within the room. Before I could raise my head or speak a hand had snatched the picture from the easel, and turned to fly.

It was Rivaux, come at the peril of his life to save my portrait, while I, forgotten and unthought of, was left to perish. Nature, against my will, against my pride, uttered the cry that burst from my lips as he turned to the window, unheeding me.

"Great heavens!" he ejaculated at the call. "Are you then here, Regina? Come, there is not a moment to be lost. To the ladder—you first."

I staggered up to my feet, but in the moment that I had delayed him the flames burst through the walls of the room from the burning hall, and at the same instant a red flag of fire flaunted in at the window from without.

"Come!" said Rivaux, through his set teeth, seizing me and thrusting me out from certain death behind to little less than certain death before, for already the ladder was on fire.

Down, down, me first, and after me Rivaux, a few brief moments in reality, an age in seeming! Now a barbed tongue of flame darted out from the streaming windows of the two stories below me, and licked my cheek as I passed, now fiery fingers reached and snatched after my floating hair, while blasts of scorching air came at every breathing, and the rounds of the ladder were blistering hot to hands and feet.

"God forgive me, that I forgot for a little all but Lulu and the child!" I heard Theo murmur, as he received me at the ladder's foot, enveloping me close in some woollen garments to crush out the fire which had seized upon me.

I must have fainted just then, for I remember no more till I found myself lying upon a bed in the house of a neighbor, while over me was bending good old Doctor Cane.

"Never fear," he said, as I opened my eyes; "your good looks are all safe, Regina. There won't be a scar, and your hair will soon repair damages for itself."

I turned my face wearily away, for his allusion to my beauty recalled how it happened that Rivaux had saved me. But how had it fared with him, for he had been behind, and every moment told in that flight from fire? Was he safe?

At this moment, Lulu, standing in the door, and dismissing the physician with some words which I was not heeding, sighed softly—"Poor Rivaux!"

"Lulu!" I called. "Lulu, come here. What of Monsieur Rivaux?"

"He went back," she said, hesitatingly, "went back for something after he was half way down. It was madness."

For something? For that accursed picture. I grasped her arm so fiercely that she uttered a little distressed cry. "He is not dead?" I said. "He is not dead?"

"No, but his eyes. The doctor doubts if he will ever see again, and the ladder had burned so that it snapped while he was yet far from the ground, and he has a broken limb."

I did not say a word, but lay as quietly as I could, waiting for the morning; and when it was day I went out, despite the remonstrances of Lulu, closely veiled, with the bandages still about my forehead and face.

Rivaux had not a relative on this side of the ocean, not a woman soul nearer than his landlady in America. Once he had asked me to be his wife, and I had refused, trembling all the while lest he should guess that I loved him. Now I was going to tell him that I loved him, to beg, on my bended knees, if need be, to be his wife, so that I might care for him. He had need of me now, need of woman's love and tenderness. I could give and ask not back now, all my pride swallowed up in the

flood of pity that rushed into my soul at thought of him helpless and suffering, all my fears of not being loved forgotten in loving.

As I went into his chamber, he lay with his hands folded on his breast, still as death, save a little low moaning that stirred his lips now and then. Somebody has said that in woman's love there is always something of the maternal. I felt it at that moment as I looked upon Rivaux. I laid my hand tenderly upon his forehead, and then I bent and kissed his lips.

"What! Who is it?" he said, turning his bandaged eyes toward me.

"It is I, Regina Maymont," I said. "I love you, Rivaux, love you so well, that now you need me, I no longer care to hide it from you, no longer am unhappy because it was my beauty alone that won you. Do not send me away, Rivaux. Had nothing happened, I could have let you go with the picture, and died in silence; but now—it is not to be loved, but only to love that I ask."

"Poor child!" he said, taking my hand in his. (Ah, how much sweeter this simple word sounded in my ear than goddess!) "I never dreamed that you cared for me in this way. But I cannot let you sacrifice yourself thus. I am helpless and blind—perhaps for always. No, no! you must not throw yourself away on me, who can no longer look upon you, or glory in your perfection."

I felt at once that he would be inexorable, and that I could not, would not leave him. Is deceit ever justifiable? I do not know. I did not stop then to consider it even.

"My perfection!" I said, raising his hand to my shrouded forehead and cheeks, and passing it over my hair, which had suffered most of all. "Of what account is a thing so perishable that a breath of fire may destroy it, the accident of an hour obliterate it?"

Well, I triumphed at last, as I never should have triumphed if I had not led him to suppose that the flames had taken from me somewhat of that which it seemed to him would have made me more of a sacrifice to his sightless life. I insisted on an immediate marriage, feeling that his need of my care made that proper which would have been unwomanly under other circumstances. I wore the bandages about my

face much longer than was really needful, and forbade all who had access to him to undeceive him as to the extent of my injuries.

I nursed him tenderly, perhaps all the more tenderly because I was never thinking of his love for me, but only and always of my love for him. And yet his gratitude was very sweet, sweeter far to me than all the old raptures over my beauty, which he fancied marred forever, and I never allowed myself to sigh for anything more. Besides, every day a little hope was growing to be a great one with me, a hope which the doctor's assurance one evening that I might consider certainty gave me all the happiness my heart could hold, I thought. Rivaux would see again—his eyes would be entirely restored! There had been little hope of this at first, grave doubts for a long time, then faint and fluctuating encouragement, so that it had been deemed best to keep it all from Rivaux (who had made up his mind to the worst), for fear of final and more bitter disappointment.

"You must tell him this to-night, Madame Rivaux," said the good doctor; "and to-morrow I shall tell him that he owes it half to your wonderful nursing."

I rarely allowed Rivaux to be long alone, for I feared that he would brood over his condition if left much in solitude. Now, as I entered his room again, he cried, with a joyful accent that thrilled me, "It is you, Regina? I am so glad always when you come back."

I could not keep back for a moment the happy news. I threw myself on my knees beside his chair, and seizing his hands, I cried:

"Louis, O Louis! you are going to have your eyes again—you are going to see. Do you hear? The doctor says it."

"Thank God!" Rivaux murmured; and then—

O, what was it, all this joy, this thankfulness, this bliss? Who knows the limit of his capacity for either grief or happiness? A moment before I had felt that, Rivaux's sight restored, I asked no more; but now, lying on my husband's breast, close, close within his arms—listening not to gratitude, not to admiration, but to love, love for me myself, my beauty, its loss or presence alike forgotten—I tasted heaven.

It was the eyes of the artist, I knew, not of the husband, that lighted so when the

bandages removed from his eyes, Louis Rivaux beheld me, to his surprise as well as delight, as fair as ever, and I did not tremble. He had learned to love me when he thought my beauty gone forever, and if, as the years go by, my portrait, which Rivaux has restored, and which now hangs

upon our chamber wall, shall suggest to me change and fading bloom in myself, I shall not fear lest Rivaux see it, too, and love me less, for his love is that which is from within to within; the love which knows no possibility of unloving.

## MY PHANTOM.

MISS AMANDA M HALE

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## MY PHANTOM.

BY MISS AMANDA M. HALE.

How like gold the sunshine lies on the leaves, how deliciously cool and dark are the shadows under the towering, century-old oaks, how lovely is the turf of the park—soft as velvet, green as emerald! 'This park is my pride. It dips into green dewy hollows or rises in scenery knolls, and so with many coquettish undulations sweeps on to the shining river that winds through the valley. The valley is renowned far and wide for its beauty, and the stream bears upon its silver thread a handful of the sweetest villages in England.

Close to the houses are pastures glowing with flowers; my rhododendrons are a blaze of beauty, the noon air is rich with odors.

The mansion house too is beautiful. I

think it is just such a house as poetic romance-loving souls delight in; wide and lofty, with spacious echoing halls; and ample staircases, and yet with cosy fireside nooks, and pleasantness and sunshine throughout it; crowded too with what pleases the senses and satisfies the artistic perception. I have ransacked the continent for pictures and statuary, and not a bit of canvas or marble is there that would not do credit to a connoisseur. Very dear are they to Elise, for they were gathered mostly during our bridal tour, and are full of charmed memories. This cameo from Naples recalls moonlight sails upon her beautiful bay; that mosaic reminds me of Florence and her galleries of wonders; yonder fret-work of

Etruscan gold speaks of the city of the gondolas, and begets sweet remembrances of her strange fairy beauty. And so to the end.

If you should step into the stables you would exclaim against the luxury of the day. Sultan and Mahmoud fare better than many a man in this most Christian land. Elise's lovely Arabian is petted like a princess.

Why not? I like to spend. Why should I hoard it up? There is no boy or girl to perpetuate my name, and inherit my fortune. Why not fling my money to the winds? 'Tis a small pleasure, and I have few. You smile at that. My friend, Charlie Trafford, has just parted from me after a week's visit.

The lad has a genial, pleasure-loving nature, and I think he was bewitched by the beauty lavished all about. Leaning upon the gate by the lodge and looking over my magnificent domain, he said:

"What a happy fellow you must be, Bryan!"

"Happy! Me happy!"

Such bitter thoughts surged up at the words. Charlie stared at me.

"What an incomprehensible you are!" he said, half-impatiently. "If you can't be happy here you couldn't be in paradise!"

"I dare say I couldn't. But no matter, I'm not likely to get there."

"Not unless you slough off some of your cynicism," said Charlie, looking back at me laughing, as he vaulted into the saddle, and rode off gayly.

It was a pretty sight—youth, beauty and vivid life, but it gave me no pleasure. Because that face reminded me of another white, dead face, which had looked up at me from the burning sands of a torrid land, because those eyes were like his eyes in pathos and tenderness, because every look and gesture recalls him—gives distinctness to the phantom which dogs me forever.

My nerves were quivering and my brain was hot as I went back to Elise. I was longing for her cool hands on my head, and yet I was fool enough to scare her away. She came to meet me, her blue eyes tender and smiling.

"So Charlie is gone!"

"Yes!"

Something touched me on the shoulder. I started away with an angry exclamation. Poor Elise crimsoned and the tears rushed to her eyes. It was only her little hand, white and soft as a lily petal.

"I beg your pardon," I said, with dogged shame; "I thought it was something else."

If I only could tell her about the phantom. But I couldn't. Of course she thought me savage—me—cruel to *her* whom I would lay down my life to save her a trifling pain.

She crushed back her tears, but she did not touch me again—only walked straight by my side. When we got to the house I rudely took myself away from her. My mood was too awful for her to share it.

It is not always so. Sometimes I have sweet forgetfulness—my memories are all drugged, and I bask in the sweetness of her love, and am blissfully happy. And then the phantom comes. He has been here all the days of Charlie's visit, and now that he is gone this ghastly presence stands between me and the sunshine—pale, bloody, great gaping wounds in breast and side, and he lifts imploring, reproachful eyes to mine.

I shade my face with my hands, and here in the gloom of my library, while all the light and glory of the summer are abroad, while flowers blossom, and the lark sings to his mate, and the sky is blue, I live over again that bitter past.

I was a mere youth when I went out to India, under a captain's commission, procured for me by that uncle who left me this lovely estate of Enderly. He was a churlish old fellow, soured and hardened perhaps in early life, and his nephew was not likely to gain many friends on account of his interest. But I had my share of pride and I asked no favors of my superiors. I worked hard and did my duty, and gradually got the reputation of being a shy odd sort of a man, but one who could be depended upon.

It was a matter of amazement to me when General Bretton began to urge me to come to his house.

"My daughter wants to see the man who bore himself so bravely during the rebellion," said he, smiling. "So don't fight shy of us, captain, Elise is a good girl, and the society of good girls is the right thing for young men."

I know I colored as I made my awkward thanks. What if I had told him that ever since she came out to India, Elise Bretton had been my idol, daily contemplated and worshipped in secret? I fancy the general would have shrugged his shoulders, lifted his eyebrows and intimated calmly that I was mad. For the Brettons were an old family, and the bluest blood of the nation ran in their veins, while I was simply Bryan Thorpe, with my captain's commission and pay.

But I went up to the general's house as he



bade me, and I came away more the slave of Elise than before. After that my passion, fed by frequent meetings, burned more and more fiercely. It was a mighty love—it struck its roots deep down in my nature, it made a gayer, brighter man of me. Secretly I cherished hope. When I should rise, when I got my colonel's brevet, then I would speak, I said to myself.

Meantime Elise was bewilderingly kind. I think she liked me then, poor thing. If I had spoken it might have availed. I have seen her sweet eyes search my face, full of pain, and love, and doubt. But I held my peace. Pride kept me silent.

And so two years went on. Lovers came to her and were sent away. I exulted in the certainty that there was no one who could take her from me. And soon light shone. The general told me he had recommended me for promotion.

It was while we were waiting for news from England that Alick Trafford came out, a new-pledged captain; gallant, and handsome, and lovable, not profound, or wise, or great. A man to like, I thought, but not a man to fear.

Alick went into my old regiment and somehow became intimate with me. I think he sought it. His sunshiny temperament liked to play over my more sombre nature. In all my life no man ever got into my heart like Alick. He was like a woman in his winsomeness.

We used to talk of Elise. He knew how profoundly I admired her, but he never guessed my love. One day putting his arm around my neck in a girlish, caressing way he had, and looking up at me with his gentle blue eyes he said:

"You are in the doldrums, Bryan. You often are. You should marry. A sweet wife would scare away these moods."

"I dare say," I said, dryly. "Which of the sallow-faced, torpid women we know would you suggest?"

"Not your washerwoman or your cook," said Alick, laughing. Then with hesitation he added, "I know of only one woman who is worthy."

"And who may that be?" I asked, throwing away my cigar and looking him in the face.

Alick blushed rosy red and stammered out:

"You must know. Elise Bretton of course."

I laughed out, a sharp, hard, scornful laugh. What demon inspired me I know not. Alick started, looked pained. He thought I scorned her—her—my pearl, my angel!

"Thorpe, you are horribly proud. If Elise Bretton is not good enough for you no woman on the planet is."

"We will not discuss the matter," I said, coldly.

I could not—I should have betrayed myself, and I shrank unutterably from laying bare my heart to him. Whatever was there Elise should see it first. So there was silence between us. If I had told him then all would have been well, for Alick was no serpent to steal into another man's place.

The Sikhs mutinied again. I was sent with a body of them, who had been taken prisoners, into the hill country. I was gone two months, never seeing Elise all that time.

When I came back I found a black, sullen atmosphere brooding over the town. I knew well what it portended.

"I hope you have doubled your guard and discharged all the natives," I said, to General Bretton.

"No!" calmly taking a pinch of snuff. "I place perfect confidence in my faithful natives."

"What madness, General Bretton! Not a man of them is true."

He smiled incredulously.

"At least let me add a company from my regiment, enough to hold the devils in hand if they attempt revolt. It is horrible to think of you and your daughter being at their mercy."

It was only by persistent urging that I got the order—so entire was the general's infatuation.

I put twenty-five picked men in the guards about the general's house, and I myself slept close within call.

One night—a night hot even for that torrid climate, I was wakeful. The evening I had spent with Elise, and it had acted upon me like a keen stimulant. Every sense was awake.

Lying with my eyes half open I heard a stealthy footfall upon the floor and the next minute a dark figure crossed the window.

I was up in an instant—in three minutes was dressed, and armed to the teeth, stepped out.

The darkness was soft and dense, but I could make out dim shapes, passing and re-passing, and crowding up to the door of the house. Less experienced senses might have taken them for shadows, made by the waving palms which grew thick in the yard. But I knew they were Sikhs! And I knew too,

that my soldiers had been drugged and were asleep at their posts!

No blow had been struck as yet. Was there time to act? I glided noiselessly a little distance, and then ran with the speed of the wind to the nearest barracks.

I challenged the sentinel, passed in, roused the commandant, told the news in five words, got fifty men under arms and then crept back at their head, silent, swift, eager to strike the blow which must fall by surprise.

Just when we were at the gate a curdling, dreadful shriek rang out. I sprang erect, thrilled to the core. Disguise was useless.

"On boys and cut down the human devils."

In an instant the great hall was thronged; my brave men and the cowardly assassins met; sabres flashed, and pistol shots hissed. The wretches fell on their knees and begged for mercy—they, who spared neither age, nor childhood, nor tender woman.

I cut my way through the melee and made straight for Elise's chamber. I had not watched her night lamp so long not to know where it was.

As I entered a vile Sikh leaped from the chamber window. I rushed in. My darling lay there on her bed, swooning with terror, but, God be praised, unhurt. I caught her in my arms and gave her my first warm, eager kisses, and then when the red tides began to mantle her cheeks, and her soft eyes unclosed, I gave her up to her women and went away.

The mutiny was quelled in half an hour. A little later and oceans of blood would have flowed.

Early in the forenoon General Bretton sent for me to his house. When I got there he could only wring my hand and say in a smothered voice:

"You have saved us all, Colonel Thorpe. God bless you!"

At last, a little calmer, he said:

"Elise wants you. Go in there."

I trembled from head to foot when I entered her presence, and as she stood there drooping, smiling through tears, I had hard work not to take her in my arms and hold her there, as I had done the night before. She came up to me and put her hand in mine:

"I am glad to owe you so much, Colonel Thorpe. All my life I shall be proud of having so brave a man for friend."

"Friend! Elise, you mock me!"

She looked at me, a dawning trouble in her eyes.

My reserve melted. A great flood of tenderness swept away my doubt.

"My love—my darling!" I cried, drawing her close to my heart. "Do you not know that I love you—that the word is weak to express my wild worship?"

I kissed her cheek, her quivering lips, the soft bright head.

A moment she lay in my arms, nestled to me, thrilled my heart with a belief that she loved me. Then with a sudden sharp cry of pain she wrenched herself away.

"O, let me go! As you pity me go away. O, you must never see me again!"

A horrible chill fell upon me.

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

All the color fled from her face. She shook like a leaf.

"I am engaged to Alick Trafford!" she said, very low.

A moment I stood like one stunned. Then I exclaimed, fiercely:

"Alick Trafford! Do you love him? Ah, my God! Elise, do you love him?"

Her hands were crossed upon her heart which heaved with suppressed sobs.

"Alick! I love him. I could not help it. He is good!"

"He is a villain!" I said, madly. "He stole you from me in my absence. Curse him! A thousand times curse him!"

"O hush," she cried, a storm of tears breaking forth. "You don't know what you say. Go now, pray. I pity you—but go—go!"

Will you think me wild if I say that I knew then that she loved me—that while her tender heart felt such affection for Alick as he could win, deep down was the strong passion which bound her to me. And I had stood by like a fool and seen nothing. I had been silent and let him win her before my eyes.

I was struck dumb as the extent of the calamity unfolded before me. I submitted to be led away, I heard her bid me good-by, while the tears streamed from her eyes. I went stupidly back to my quarters, and kept saying to myself that my darling was lost to me.

There were orders to be given regarding the late mutiny. Troops were to be sent into the country for fresh men.

Alick Trafford came in and talked the matter over with shivers and passionate exclamations.

"To think she should have been in the power of one of those wretches! You know

—you have heard about—Elise and me,” he said, blushing like a girl.

I stared at him stupidly.

“It was while you were gone that we came to an understanding,” he continued, “but we have been tending towards it a long time. I am glad you know and prize my dear girl as she deserves.”

His! My rage almost passed bounds. I know I grew deadly white.

“Good Heaven, Bryan!” he exclaimed; “are you ill?”

Some faint prudence came back. I staggered to a chair.

“Yes, I am ill. Last night’s work was too much for me.”

He pestered me with pity, begged to know what he could do for me, and at last went away, hurt at my madness and distressed by my miserable looks.

I hate to go over those days—to think how that love-making went on under my eyes, to remember how I was torn by regret, and jealousy, and despair.

At last quite worn out I begged a furlough on the plea of ill health, and went up among the hills for three months. When I came back it was all over. She had been his wife a month.

A dogged submission was all that was left to me. I know my men wondered what ailed their colonel. My friends fell off, hurt and piqued. And I lived on. Two years went. Elise had a child in her arms.

One day stores were needed from Serampore—medical stores, for an epidemic had broken out. Expedition was essential.

Captain Trafford volunteered to go.

“Five men are all I want,” he said.

“You will go by the road?”

“No! I shall cross the jungle.”

“You had better take ten men!”

Alick laughed.

“Because of the tigers? No. I fancy that our last hunt did for them. I haven’t heard of one for six weeks.”

“Very well! When are you off?”

“At sundown,” said Alick; and went away whistling gayly. He was happy. Yes. But did he know such deep and perfect bliss as I should have known if she had been my wife?

I saw him go away, his fine figure and manly bearing rousing a keener hate, and then I sat down to my letters. The first one I opened was from my uncle’s solicitor. The old man was dead and had left me Enderley and thousands of pounds besides.

“Too late! too late!” I groaned. Once it

could have bought for me all I longed for in the world, now it could not bring me an atom of pleasure. I wrote to the lawyer to go on letting the estate as I should live and die in India.

Later I lounged out into the mess-room. A lieutenant came up to me and asked, excitedly:

“Colonel, how many men did Trafford take?”

“Five!” I answered.

“Not half enough,” he exclaimed. “The tigers are infesting the jungle again. A party of these natives have just come in who lost a companion by them, and one was seen within a mile of town last night. You’ll order a detachment to follow him immediately?”

“Tush! your fears magnify the danger,” I said, turning away.

“But, colonel!” persisted the man. “’Tis the talk of the news-room. If anything happens you’ll be seriously blamed.”

I drew myself up haughtily:

“I am not in the habit of consulting my inferiors as to my duty. I must wish you good-evening, Lieutenant Douglass.”

I went to my bedroom. It was a hot breathless night. The drought and heat had driven the tigers nearer town, they said. Pshaw! Six well-armed men should be competent to protect themselves. And if not—if anything did happen Elise would be free—and—O, the delirium of joy at the thought—she might yet be mine!

The night wore away. All the dark hours I tossed about wakefully. Morning came at last and the sulphurous atmosphere was stirred by a light wind. With the dawn I was up and presently I was called out to the receiving-room.

It was Elise, her child clinging to her hand. Her face was pale, her hair dishevelled.

“Colonel Thorpe, what is this I hear? These stories of the tigers? I am frightened to death. Has my poor Alick gone out to be murdered by those beasts?”

Her beautiful face was wild with pain. I had not seen her for a whole year, and never in her girlhood had she looked so lovely to me as now.

I begged her to be calm. I would send a strong escort instantly.

“If they should be too late!” she said, wringing her hands.

A sense of suffocation was upon me. If they should be too late I should have murdered him.

"I will go myself!" I said. I took ten men, natives and soldiers, and started.

A lurid sunrise hung over the town. Some malign presence seemed to be abroad. There was something weird and awful in the brassy sky, in the brown parched earth, in the hot wind which scorched our faces as it passed.

Ten miles from town we entered the jungle. We went in the path we knew they would take. An hour or two passed, no signs of them. We were in the heart of the dense, tangled, almost impassable copse.

The cowardly natives fell into the rear. Presently a man who rode a little ahead, turned and came back swiftly, shuddering.

"I saw marks of a struggle and blood on the bushes and the ground," he said.

After that we kept close together. Wild thoughts began to surge in my mind, tantalizing visions which shut out all remorse.

Presently we heard a low ominous growl. Every eye was on the alert, every pistol cocked, every sabre in hand. A few more awful minutes passed, when suddenly the man at my side drew rein. I followed his eye and saw from the midst of a thicket two fierce flaming eyeballs glaring upon us. In a single breath the whole cavalcade was motionless.

"Aim low!" I said, steadily. "Two fire at a time—as we stand. Keep cool!"

There was no cowardice, no shrinking now. Fight or die was the word.

"Now, fire!"

Instantly two pistols blazed, and a howl of rage and pain broke from the thicket. Two more shots crashed through the air and missed, for just as the trigger was drawn the brute leaped from the thicket and fastened upon the nearest horse, just missing the man. Down went all three with yells and shrieks into the dust.

"Fire, every man!" I shouted.

They had not waited for the order, but poured in bullet after bullet, and in a minute the tiger relaxed his hold upon poor Dick, and rolled over and over in agony, leaping high into the air at last and falling dead in the midst of the troop.

We took up the soldier, stanching the blood, found a few severe flesh wounds were the extent of injury.

"Keep up good courage, Dick!" I said. "We'll have you back to camp in a trice. By Jupiter, he was a mighty beast!"

In the excitement I had forgotten everything till one of the men exclaimed:

"What is that?"

We listened. Something was heard like a human voice in supplication.

"Great God! If that should be poor Trafford!" said Lieutenant Douglass.

The thought struck me cold with horror. Slowly, cautiously we penetrated the jungle in the direction of the sound. We had not far to go. A weak voice called out to us. We turned aside and there he lay.

"O, I am so glad you have come. You cannot save my life but you can take me back home and bury me quietly. Poor Elise! She can kiss me once more. You must not let her see my wounds."

The men sobbed aloud, and I knelt down by him, and hid my face in my hands. I could not bear to see the ghastly rents in the handsome form, to see his red life-blood flowing away.

"Don't grieve!" he said, faintly. "If the two native men hadn't deserted us we should have pulled through. The other poor fellows died quick, but your coming drew the beast away from me. Never mind. One must die sometime."

A minute or two more and he whispered:

"I'm going fast. Thorpe, look here!"

I put my head down close.

"There has been coldness between us, Bryan. I've grieved over it, for I always have loved you. Lately I've thought that perhaps—if it had not been for me—you might have had Elise for your wife—that perhaps you might have made her happier than I could. But I loved her and I've done my best. I never tried to oust you. I didn't know—you never told me—"

The words died away, the breath almost stopped.

"Kiss me!" he whispered, painfully. Kissed him tenderly over and over—I begged him to forgive me—I said he was not to blame—it was I, only I.

I doubt if he heard. The mists of death were already veiling his eyes. He was slipping away over the dark river and was already out of sight of shore. A minute and earthly love and sound were all over. The eternal peace was upon him.

I hasten on. We bore him home. I would not go to tell Elise. Should I dare to become hateful to her forever? Some one else did it.

Poor child! She mourned him truly. Within a half year other troubles followed. Her father died, then her child. I became much to her.

A year went by and then I begged her to marry me. My heart was dead to remorse then, dead to everything but love. I had paid the price—should I not have my reward?

Elise consented. She could not do else. She loved me. I exulted in that knowledge. The day after we were married she made a confession.

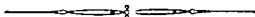
“You know,” she whispered, “that I loved dear Alick—but, I worshipped you. O Bryan, after you told me your love I had a cruel struggle. I thought my heart would break. But Alick’s happiness was bound up in me,

and I kept my promise. I did my best to be a true wife to him, and he never knew.”

So my darling was indeed mine. Pretty soon I took her home to Enderley. I had lost favor in my regiment and I was rich enough to come home.

We have no children. I don’t think Elise misses them, for she has me—and I—I should want nothing in life beside her were it not for this phantom which dogs my steps, stands beside my pillow, sits with me at table, poisons my peace, my love, my life.

O Alick Trafford, you are well avenged!



## MY SISTER ANNABEL.

BY MISS FANNIE FRANCIS.

I DON'T know if all boys love their sisters as I loved Annabel; but very sure I am that few have such a sister. She was my twin sister, and all my life I had never been separated from her.

I had been a cripple from my birth, and so weak and delicate that the fatigue of moving about on crutches was often more than I could bear; day after day I lay on a couch, worn out by pain and suffering, and Annabel tended and cared for me. I wearied sometimes of books and other things provided me with which to while away the painful tedious hours, but never of her—never of the tender kisses she pressed upon my burning forehead—never of the melodies she sang—never of the stories she told. Very beautiful and bonnie was she. I liked to watch her as she talked—liked to listen to the gentle voice, to see the shifting lights and shadows upon the lovely face, the glorious eyes grow luminous with earnest feeling.

It was a quiet place in which we lived. There were the rector and the curate, the doctor and the lawyer, and the usual sprinkling of tradespeople, of ladies of uncertain age and small certain incomes, of bachelors and spinsters, of widows and widowers, which usually make up the population of a small country town.

About a mile outside the town, standing far back from the road in its own grounds, was Leigh Place—our home. Just opposite was Heron Vale, the residence of Mrs. Heron, a widow lady. About two miles distant was Melbourne Court, the seat of Lord Kindair. There is no place in all England more beautiful; it is a home fit for royalty. Yet his lordship rarely visited it.

We came of a grand old race, we Westerners—a race whose men had never shrunk from a daring deed, if the cause was good and noble, whose women had been famed for their beauty and grace, and honored for their goodness and truth. Rich too, and given to hospitality, we had been esteemed; but that was long ago. It would only be wearisome were I to tell how it came to pass that every succeeding generation of the Westerners grew poorer and poorer, until

but very little remained to us—mother, Annabel, and myself—save the name and Leigh Place.

We were proud of Leigh Place; it had been handed down from father to son for centuries. A quaint old possession it was, with gray turrets pointing skyward; long wide corridors with painted windows, through which the sunlight glinted and glimmered, and cast warm rich shadows; spacious lofty rooms with massive, old-fashioned furniture; a pleasant terraced garden, where peacocks strutted with gaudy outspread plumage, and bright-hued fragrant flowers blossomed, and birds sang the day through, with never-tiring throats, sweet songs of gladness.

I have but a faint recollection of my father—of anything concerning him save his death. That I remember perfectly. I remember his starting out one bright summer morning, when balmy southern breezes played amidst his golden hair, and brought a soft glow to his cheek; also the gay loving words with which he left us, being held before him on his horse as he rode down the avenue of grand old oaks and sycamores. I remember, more distinctly than all, the agonized cry that rang through the house, just as the shadows of evening were gathering, as my mother rushed into the hall and flung herself down beside a still form which had been tenderly borne in. I remember that the blue eyes slowly unclosed, that the pale lips murmured faintly "Poor Mabel!" and then the lids closed again—forever. In the full flush and promise of life's golden summer, with the future spreading fair and smiling before him, full of high hopes and aspirations, my father had been killed by a fall from his horse.

I have been told that from that day my mother became a changed woman—that the gracious manner, the winning smiles, all died away—that the face grew grave and stern, the voice cold and proud; that, rejecting all sympathy and withdrawing from all society, she devoted herself exclusively to her children—from all society save that of Mrs. Heron of Heron Vale. Mr. Heron had been an officer in the army, had served

for many years in India, and died there from the effects of a sunstroke. Mrs. Heron had but one child—a son, Hubert—a few years older than Annabel and I. Some similarity in their circumstances, it might have been, drew the two women together; certain it is that the friendship subsisting between Mrs. Heron and my mother was deep and lasting.

Seeing the love we bore each other, my mother did not send Annabel away, as she might otherwise have done, but provided her with a governess at home. As for myself, the curate came and instructed me in what it was considered essential that I should learn. I, the poor cripple, was not likely to require any vast amount of booklore. So the years passed on—happy ones they were—years in which care and sorrow were to us but empty words—till Annabel and I were seventeen; then the governess was sent away, and the curate's visits—in his capacity of teacher—to Leigh Place ceased.

I think if ever I regretted my helplessness, it was then. With time at my disposal, free to do as I would, how I longed to ramble with Annabel over the hills and through the valleys, amongst pleasant-gemmed meadows and deep dense woods! But she gave me no time for repining. Every fine morning she would have me lifted into a low basket-carriage, drawn by a rough Shetland pony, and would drive me miles and miles—sometimes along dusty hilly high roads, in search of a fine view, at other times down green shady lanes, beside babbling murmuring waters. All the afternoon long she read or conversed with me; in the gloaming she sang. I dread to think what my life would have been at that time without Annabel.

Hubert Heron had left home then. Much to the dismay of his mother, he had chosen to adopt his father's profession. The mother thought, sorrowfully enough, of the privations and dangers of a soldier's life; but, seeing that her son's heart was set upon it, she did not attempt to dissuade him from it. Very little saw Heron Vale of him.

He was a noble-looking fellow, tall and erect, with sunny hair and bright blue eyes; brave and fearless, as a soldier should be, with a certain tender chivalry in his bearing towards women which it was pleasant to see. Looking upon him, people instinctively trusted him.

About this time the war with Russia broke out, and Hubert's regiment was amongst the first ordered away. I will not dwell upon the grief which the news caused at Heron Vale. Every mother who has parted from an only child, uncertain if ever again beholding him, can imagine it.

The day came when Hubert Heron bade us "farewell" with a voice which he strove in vain to render steady, and eyes the dimness of which did no disgrace to his manhood—went away with his mother's kiss still warm upon his cheek, his mother's blessing ringing in his ears.

But something beside his mother's blessing accompanied him—a curl of glossy golden-brown hair. Before he went he sought my mother, told her that he loved Annabel, and begged her to give him hope to take with him that, if he lived to return, she should be his wife. Annabel was called in—the sweet blushing face told its own story. Hubert's character was everything that could be desired. He was sufficiently rich. There was no just reason why my mother should withhold her consent; so Hubert Heron went away with the hope which was as dear as life to him.

Annabel's face may have been a trifle less bright and her smile not quite so ready for a time, but she bore Hubert's departure well. She was only seventeen, and hope is very strong in a woman's heart at that age.

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## CHAPTER II.

WHEN autumn came round with its brown golden glory, we had received but three letters from Hubert Heron—only three—but they had been read and read again as never were letters before. We started out one fine sunny morning, Annabel and I, for a drive.

"Let it be a long one," I cried. "There will be few more days like this."

It was, indeed a lovely day—the remembrance of it returns to me vividly even now. In fancy I see the broad road, with great old trees on either side, hedges in which the late dog-roses and woodbine yet lingered, the little carriage with its shaggy pony and blithe bonnie driver. A fair picture was the latter for a brother's eye to rest upon, in her simple print dress with its dainty frillings, her jaunty blue sailor jacket, her broad-brimmed hat crowning her golden-brown hair with coquettish grace.

I like to recall it—to think of the lovely face as it looked then before sorrow had clouded its brightness—to remember how like two careless happy children we were.

"I think the brightness of the morning has infected our spirits," said Annabel. "Wynter, will you hold the reins? I must have some of those lovely roses."

I laughed a pleased laugh as she sprang from the carriage and climbed the steep bank for the flowers.

"I should like to make a picture of you, Annabel. I would call it 'Queen of the Morning,'" I cried.

"You saucy Wynter! O, isn't that too bad?"

A capricious envious breeze had swept up the road, lifting the roses far beyond her reach. I sat enjoying her efforts to regain them, admiring the rich color which the exercise brought to her cheeks, the pretty pout which rested on her lips.

"Isn't it a shame!" she cried. "But I will not be defeated!"

As she spoke she sprang, and made a clutch at the coveted spray. A cry of alarm burst from my lips as I saw her attempt to regain her footing and then fall heavily down the bank. She lay for a moment without speaking; from her face and lips every trace of color had fled; but for her wide-open eyes I should have thought she had fainted. In my terror I knew not what to do, for I was unable to alight from the carriage unassisted.

"Wynter," she said, speaking sharply, and in evident pain, "I have sprained my ankle. I cannot get to the carriage without assistance, and you cannot help me. Are you brave enough to drive on until you meet with somebody who will come to me?"

I did not like the idea, but we were far away from home, and something must be done.

"And leave you here by the roadside, and in pain? Will that be well?"

"I can think of no other plan, Wynter. You will surely meet with some one soon."

Looking about me with anxious eager eyes, I espied a gentleman in a field some little distance off. Little mattered it to me who he was, so that help could be obtained. In a few minutes I was within speaking distance. I waited for no ceremonious greeting; the thought of Annabel in pain and alone made me utterly forgetful of politeness.

"Please come to my sister," I shouted. "She has fallen down a bank and hurt her foot."

The gentleman came leisurely toward the hedge that bounded the field—a fine tall man he was, with dark hair and eyes, and proud grave face; his age was apparently about forty. There was amusement as well as surprise in the look with which he regarded me.

"Why did you not help her yourself?" he demanded, coolly.

"I am a cripple," I cried, indignantly; "I cannot move without help, or I should not have left her alone on the roadside."

"I beg you will pardon me," he returned, voice and manner alike undergoing a marked change; "I was not aware of that. I will be with you directly."

He walked rapidly towards the gate, and in a few minutes was seated beside me, driving to Annabel. Very wan and white looked her face when we came up to her, but the rich color mounted to her brow as she met the dark eyes of the gentleman fixed admiringly upon her.

"I fear we must appear very rude," she said; "but I have fallen down the bank and sprained my ankle, and am unable to move without help. My brother is lame, and cannot come to me; if you would kindly assist me to the carriage, I could manage nicely."

I could not but admire the gentle delicate way in which he assisted her; she was soon seated comfortably beside me, the injured foot resting on a cushion. I experienced a thrill of pride as I saw how admiringly his eyes rested upon the sweet bonnie beauty of her face—how evidently he was charmed with the gracious, highbred manner with which she thanked him.

"I should like to know the name of the lady whom I have had the happiness of serving," he said.

"We are Wynter and Annabel Westerne," she replied, "of Leigh Place."

"I had formerly the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Westerne," he said; "I esteem myself fortunate in meeting with her children. I am Robert, Lord Kindair. I shall be anxious to hear of the progress of your foot; will you grant me permission to call upon you."

It was readily given, and with a low bow, a courteous "Good-day," and a lingering glance at Annabel, he left us?



"Wynter," said Annabel, giving me a little comical look of dismay, "what must his lordship think of us?"

"Who would have taken that to be his lordship?" I retorted. "I did not even know that he was in England."

My mother's alarm was great upon hearing of our adventure, and strict injunctions were laid upon us never again to drive out unattended. Annabel's ankle was much hurt, and threatened to confine her to the house for some days. I had feared my mother's displeasure when she should learn of the permission given Lord Kindair to visit Leigh Place, and was agreeably surprised to hear her say:

"I remember him well; I used to admire him greatly. I shall be pleased to be enabled to thank him for the service he has rendered Annabel."

The next day he came. If we had been pleased with him on the previous day, the pleasure was increased upon closer acquaintance. He readily accepted my mother's invitation to remain a guest at Leigh Place for the day, and we could not but be charmed with the courtly grace, the easy quiet manner with which he adapted himself to our simple ways.

I soon discovered I had never met with a man more agreeable or more thoroughly accomplished. He read to us, and the words gathered new meaning from his rendering; he told us of foreign lands, and dwelt on their beauties until I longed to see them for myself; he sang well, and played with a master hand. I was delighted—I thought it the pleasantest day I had ever spent.

"Annabel," I cried, when he had gone, "but for your pain I should esteem our yesterday's adventure most fortunate. I have never seen a man I admire as much as I do Lord Kindair."

After that day Lord Kindair came frequently to Leigh Place, and I could plainly see how agreeable to my mother were his visits. His lordship's departure from Melbourne Court was postponed again and again. Winter's snow lay thick and deep upon the ground, and frost had decked the bare trees and leafless hedges with its fairy fretwork when at last he went away.

Meanwhile nothing more had been heard of Hubert Heron. Care and anxiety were

making Mrs. Heron's handsome face look pale and worn—the sadness of its expression was pitiful to see; and Annabel's eyes wore a look of wistfulness in their depths altogether new to them. Papers were eagerly searched for news concerning Hubert, but searched in vain. Annabel had always been held in high favor at Heron Vale, and in these days Mrs. Heron clung to her more than ever—the brave hopeful heart, which would not give way to despair, comforted and upheld her.

I often wondered then if Lord Kindair had any idea of the understanding existing between Annabel and Hubert; I have known since that he had not—that he supposed the interest we felt in him was what we should have shown for any old and intimate friend whose mother we loved as we did Mrs. Heron.

Lord Kindair had gone away and Christmas had come when we heard tidings of Hubert Heron.

We had been spending the day with Mrs. Heron—my mother, Annabel, and I—and had gathered round the fire cosily in the dusk of the winter evening, when some letters were brought in.

One quick glance, and Mrs. Heron perceived that one bore a foreign postmark, and that the handwriting was that of a stranger. I pray Heaven I may never again hear a scream such as burst from her lips as she hastily scanned the contents; the remembrance lingers with me even to this day; it was the cry of the widow bereft of her sole remaining tie to earth—her only son—for the letter told that Hubert was dead. He had died gloriously, bravely, as a soldier should die, cut down upon a far-off battlefield while leading on his men valiantly in a desperate encounter.

I think from that hour the mother's heart died within her; certain it is that she rapidly sank, and when the primroses and cowslips were decking the meadows, and spring was come, we laid her to rest.

And Annabel? Never a complaint uttered she; resolutely putting aside her own sorrow, she tended and ministered to Mrs. Heron. Though my sister's face was pale and her eyes sad and heavy, she murmured not. It was her hand which smoothed the dying woman's pillow, her voice which whispered in the failing ear sweet words of hope and promise.

We were quiet then, with the hushed quietness that falls upon a house when its inmates have shared together some trying calamity.

I have said before that my mother cherished a warm attachment for Mrs. Heron, and I am sure she deeply mourned her death; but it always seemed to me that she entirely failed to understand how much Hubert's loss affected Annabel—failed to perceive how grave now were the tones which were once so joyous, how shadowed the face which was once so bright and sparkling.

The months wore on. Summer had passed, with its flowers; out in the orchards and fields men gathered the ripe luscious fruit and garnered in the golden grain; and then came Lord Kindair.

More constant than before became his visits, more gladly than ever did we welcome them. He expressed polite regrets when informed of the death of Mrs. Heron and Hubert; he had known but very little of them, and consequently could not be expected to evince any great feeling at this communication.

### CHAPTER III.

We were sitting alone, Annabel and I, in the fast deepening gloom of an autumn twilight, with no other light than that of the fire. My mother had been called from the room more than an hour before, and we decided that the lamps should not be lit until her return. We were beginning to wonder what kept her so long, when she came in; by the light of the fire I perceived the expression of pleased excitement which her features wore.

"I have had a visitor," she said, coming up to us, and sitting down beside Annabel. "It was Lord Kindair," she added, in reply to our questioning glances. "His visit was expressly to me, and the object of it has pleased and gratified me more than I can say."

It was most unusual for his lordship to pay short unceremonious visits to Leigh Place, and to take his departure without seeing us. I am sure my face must have reflected the surprise I saw plainly depicted on Annabel's.

"Lord Kindair sought me this after-

noon," said my mother, softly, "to tell me of his love for you, and of his great desire to make you his wife. Annabel, I promised his lordship that I would ascertain for him if he may hope to win you. When he comes to-morrow for his answer, what shall I tell him? Shall I say 'yes?'"

By the dim light I could see that Annabel's face was of a deathly whiteness and pallor.

"Mamma," she said, "I cannot; you forget Hubert."

Her voice was hoarse and unsteady. I had never heard that name from her lips since that sad winter day.

"Not at all, Annabel. Esteeming him as I did, that would be impossible; but that has nothing whatever to do with the question."

"Pardon me, mamma, it has everything to do with it. Had Hubert lived, I should have been his wife; I loved him more than words can tell. I like and respect Lord Kindair, and am sensible of the honor he does me; but no other can ever take Hubert's place in my heart. Do not ask me to marry him, mamma."

"But, Annabel," cried my mother, "surely you will not refuse Lord Kindair's offer? Think; position, wealth, every luxury, the love of a good man are offered you—for the sake of a memory you will never cast all this aside."

"I cannot forget Hubert, mamma," she said, tremulously. "I have made no complaint, I have tried not to leave undone any duty that I was wont to perform; but none the less deep was my love, none the less bitter is my sorrow."

"Annabel," rejoined my mother, impressively laying her hand upon her shoulder, "you and Wynter are all I have to love on God's wide earth. Since that bright summer day, years ago, which brought me such heavy grief, I have lived but for my children. You know that I, your mother, would not seek to counsel you save for your good; believe me when I tell you that this pain and sorrow will all die out—that they are but the dreamy fancies of a young girl—that the time will come when you will smile to remember what you once deemed the ruling passion of your life—that the esteem and friendship you entertain for Lord Kindair are a good basis for wedded happiness."

"Do not urge me, please, mamma," answered she.

I had kept silence until now, but I could not withstand the cry which burst with a convulsive sob from Annabel.

"Mother," I said, "what is Lord Kindair's wealth and position to us if Annabel cannot love him? They are less than nothing."

"Wynter," she exclaimed, passionately, "you know nothing of what you are talking about. Such an offer as this of Lord Kindair's does not fall to a portionless girl twice in her life."

She rose and paced up and down the room. The firelight fell upon her. A handsome stately woman she was still—one to command admiration. My glance followed her as she walked backwards and forwards in quick agitated fashion, and took in the moved expression of her face, the restless excitement pervading her manner. I was at a loss to understand it. A proud woman I had always known her to be—proud of her name, proud of Leigh Place—but this eager intense desire to influence Annabel to marry for the sake of wealth exhibited to me a new phase in her character.

"Annabel," she exclaimed, abruptly, stopping before her, "I am a proud woman. I have never asked a favor in my life, but I ask this of you. Let the answer I give Lord Kindair be favorable."

There was no reply from Annabel, no reply save that of sobs.

"Listen to me," continued my mother. "Let me tell you why I plead. Leigh Place is mortgaged—was mortgaged at your father's death, to pay outstanding debts—and now the money is called in. I have six months in which to pay it. It is impossible for me to meet the demand; I have found it extremely difficult to provide the interest. Lord Kindair, knowing this, has offered, in the kindest, most delicate manner to assist me if I will use my influence with you on his behalf."

Still no reply from Annabel. The fitful gleams of firelight played on tightly clenched hands, on a white scared face, but there was no reply.

"Annabel," resumed my mother, "it is for Wynter's sake I urge it. How can I bear to take my poor sickly boy from his home? He would pine and die away from—"

"Not for me, Annabel," I interrupted, vehemently—"not for my sake!"

She came to me then. She knelt beside me and pressed hot kisses on my brow and cheek.

"There is nothing I would not do for you," she cried, passionately. "The world holds nothing for me half so dear as you, my poor brother!" She arose then and walked to my mother. "I did not know that Leigh Place was mortgaged," she said. "Give me till morning to think. You shall have my answer then." Without waiting for my mother's words of thanks, she went to her own room.

No words can tell how wretched I was that whole evening—how through the long weary hours of the night I tossed, restless and miserable, upon my bed—how bitterly I murmured and rebelled that I was not as other men, able to fight my way, to make a name in the world, but must remain ever a useless clod, a heavy burden to those I loved. I shrank from quitting Leigh Place; yet I hated the thought of Annabel's marrying Lord Kindair against her wish. Morning found me feverish and exhausted; I was unable to leave my room. My mother came to me, but the daylight faded and I had seen nothing of Annabel. Then I longed to be down stairs, for I heard Lord Kindair's voice in the hall. The minutes lagged tediously; the day was cold and cheerless; through the branches of the trees outside the wind went moaning with a dreary mournful sound, the rain pattered dismally against my window. By-and-by I heard Annabel's step.

"Have you missed me to-day, Wynter?" she said, as she came towards me.

I took the outstretched hands and drew down the dear face for a kiss.

"Sorely, Annabel," I replied.

"Poor fellow!" she said, tenderly.

"But, dear, I have been very busy—very much engaged with my own thoughts—looking my future steadily in the face—thinking how thankful I should be that it is in my power to benefit mamma and you—you who have done so much for me. You see, dear," the clear young voice went on, "when mamma first spoke, her words took me by surprise, and I replied as I should not have done."

O faithful loving heart! O brave unselfish words, which no endeavor could render steady!

"Lord Kindair is below, Annabel."

"Yes, dear; he has been there some time. What a noble, thoughtful man he is, Wynter! I cannot understand how he came to love me."

"He may well be proud of loving you, Annabel," I said, looking into the beautiful face admiringly.

"You dear partial Wynter! When I said to him that I did not love him so much as he would perhaps desire, and that my ignorance and inexperience must at some time pain and disappoint him, he told me with such a kind pleasant smile how more than willing he was to risk his happiness. I am telling you this, dear, knowing that you would like to hear it. And, Wynter," she continued, with a little eager flutter in her voice, "he says that when I am his wife he will take me abroad, and that you shall accompany us. Think of the pleasure of it. We shall see the places we have so loved to talk and dream about—see them together." She was kneeling before me then, looking into my face with eager searching gaze. "Better than all, Wynter," she went on, speaking her words slowly, and narrowly watching their effect, "he has spoken of the skill of some German doctor—of the hope he entertains that you may be partially cured of your infirmity. Fancy, dear, standing in one of those quaint old towns by the swift-flowing Rhine, and gradually acquiring the power of walking at will!"

Heaven forgive me if it was wrong! I could not repress an eager outcry of joy. All my life long I had so prayed for health and strength—so envied the poorest, most ignorant laborer, who, rich in the use of his limbs, was free to go whither his fancy led. The listening ears caught the cry—the watchful eyes read the gladness of my face.

"Wont it be delightful, Wynter?"

"Not unless you are happy, Annabel," I cried, passionately. "I am not so utterly selfish."

"I cannot fail to be happy, Wynter."

She was quiet then, and I did not attempt to break the silence. She sat on a low cushion at my feet, her hands resting on her knees, and, watching her, I thought that, of all the ladies of the house of Kindair, she would be the loveliest.

"You are quiet, Wynter," she said, suddenly rousing herself.

"I am thinking, Annabel—thinking of the old days when we were children. I was calling to mind, too, the stories you recited to me in those days, Annabel—beautiful stories they were; many a time they soothed me as nothing else could have done."

Her hand sought mine now with a gentle caressing gesture.

"Thinking of them—of the love that dictated them—suggested to me one I should like to tell you. I am a poor storyteller, you know, Annabel; but may I try?"

"Please, Wynter."

"Well, 'once upon a time'—I must commence properly, you know—there lived a twin brother and sister—like you and me, dear—who loved each other very dearly. The girl was fair of face and brave of spirit; the boy, sickly, and crippled, and weak-hearted. All his life long had he depended upon his sister—upon her loving care, her gentle guidance. Many a time would he have utterly fainted on his life's journey but for her comforting hopeful words. There was no act of kindness too great for her to perform—no sorrow of his which she did not soothe—no joy in which she did not rejoice. It sometimes seemed to him as though the whole aim of her life was his happiness, and in no way could he repay her. A heavy sorrow befell her, but she bore it bravely and well. Her mother saw no duty neglected, her brother missed not one of those loving attentions which were so sweet to him; sorrow appeared to perfect and beautify a character which had been before almost faultless; and, watching and admiring, the brother forgot to pity. No words could do her justice, no words could express how much he loved her. Morning and evening his thought was of her, his prayer that at some time some act of his might give her happiness. But his hopes and prayers seemed always vain—still he remained a burden, still a—"

"Hush, hush, Wynter! You pain me—you were never that."

She was standing now, bending over me, tears raining down the sweet face.

"Still a—still a— Annabel, you have disturbed the flow of my ideas. I must conclude on some future occasion."

"Wynter," she said, "I must leave you now. Mamma will wonder what is keeping me so long."

"Spare me a few minutes more. Sing me a little song before you go."

"Not to-night, Wynter—not to-night."

But I still held her hand in a lingering clasp.

"Annabel," I whispered, "look at me, and tell me, will you be happy in this marriage?"

The clear luminous light of her eyes was turned full upon me.

"Wynter," she said, "none can ever be to me what Hubert was. Let this content you—not even for your sake would I marry Lord Kindair did I not like and respect him."

#### CHAPTER IV.

LORD KINDAIR was no laggard in his wooing. "I am not so young that I can afford to wait for an indefinite length of time," he said. "When spring comes, let me give Melbourne Court its mistress." And so it was decided, and preparations were at once commenced. I was satisfied to know that Annabel would be at least content, and, perceiving the passionate love which Lord Kindair had for her, I was fain to believe that happiness would surely follow. There was no wish of hers but was anticipated, no taste but was studied and gratified. A harder heart than Annabel's would have been grateful for such devotion. There was no need to question my mother's happiness; every wish of her heart was satisfied. Leigh Place would still be the home of the West-ernes—Annabel would be Lady Kindair.

April came, with its sunshine and showers. The first of May was the day appointed for the wedding. "May weddings are proverbially unlucky," Lord Kindair had said; "but ours shall prove that the old adage does not always hold true."

I think Annabel and I grew more dear than ever to each other in those days—if that was possible. Lord Kindair was not selfish in his love; he did not seek to deprive me of my sister's society. As much now as in the old days, when he had no claim upon her, was she my companion.

One morning, tempted by the soft balmy air, Annabel had me wheeled in my Bath chair out into the grounds of Leigh Place. We were alone that day, for my mother had accompanied Lord Kindair to a neighboring town in order to complete some ar-

rangements, and was not expected back until evening. Annabel had brought a book with her, and, seating herself on a garden chair, she commenced reading to me. So interested were we in the story that we did not notice the sound of steps along the gravel path until they stopped immediately in front of us. As we looked up, a scream burst from Annabel's lips. Standing before us, wan and agitated, was Hubert Heron!

In a moment she was in his arms, and he was raining passionate kisses upon her face. I was silent; not a sound could I utter; it was all so strange, so incomprehensible. Had the grave given up its dead, or in all the long months had I been dreaming when I believed that Hubert Heron had fallen upon that far-off Russian battle-field?

Annabel was the first to recover. She freed herself from his clinging arms, and sank white and trembling upon the seat, covering her face with her hands. I do not think Hubert saw me. Down on his knees before my sister he fell, and strove to take her hands in his. O, it was pitiful to hear the loving words which fell from his lips—to hear them and know that she had no right to listen!

"Annabel," he cried, "my bonnie love, I have frightened you. I should have sent you word that I was coming. Annabel, why do you turn away? Have you no word of welcome?"

"Wynter," said Annabel, gaspingly—"Wynter, tell him."

"Hubert," I said, "we all thought you were dead; an officer of your regiment wrote and told your mother so. I saw the letter myself. Annabel has no right now to be listening to your words."

He turned to me then with a puzzled inquiring air.

"But, Wynter," he cried, "you know that ail was wrong. I wrote explaining how the mistake occurred as soon as I was able. I had been so terribly wounded that for months I lay in one of the hospitals of Scutari insensible to everything. It was a poor fellow of the same regiment, and a similar name—Herbert Heron—who was killed—not I. Annabel," he said, turning again to her, "Annabel, my love, say that you welcome me."

"Hubert," I said, seeing that she was unable to answer him, "we never had your

letter; we have believed you dead, and next month Annabel will marry Lord Kindair."

Never till my dying day shall I forget the agonized look which came into his eyes, the cry of anguish which burst from his lips.

"And this is woman's constancy!" he cried; and no words could describe the bitter reproach of his voice. "This is my reward after all my sufferings! I come home and find my mother dead, and the woman who had promised to be my wife faithless and untrue!"

I forget what I said—forget the words that passed between us. I only know that at length he went away. He would not wait to see my mother, would not listen to my eager words of explanation.

"Annabel might have waited," he cried, in his unreasoning pain.

All the time Annabel had sat motionless as a statue, speaking never a word, her hands covering her face.

"Annabel," I said, softly, as the sound of his footsteps died away in the distance.

The hands were withdrawn then, and I was aghast at the sight of the face they had hidden.

"Annabel," I cried in my alarm, "Annabel, speak to me!"

"I am going in," she said, her voice hoarse and constrained; "I will send some one to you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Late in the afternoon my mother returned, and Lord Kindair accompanied her. I had not seen Annabel since the morning, and in the lonesome hours I had spent, thinking upon her sorrow—sorrow too great for words—I had decided upon the course I should adopt. In answer to their inquiries I said that Annabel had been ill, and had kept her room all day. This had the effect of despatching my mother immediately to ascertain what was the matter; and then Lord Kindair and I were alone.

I looked wistfully into the fine noble face, and thought of the many kindnesses he had shown me—of the earnest goodness which characterized him—and I shrank from the pain I was about to inflict; but for his own sake, as much as for Annabel's, he had to hear what I had to tell.

"Lord Kindair," I said, speaking abruptly, "you know what a queer fanciful

fellow I am—dreamy, you know, and different from others. Well, I have been thinking all day—that I should like to tell you a story I commenced telling Annabel the evening that she came to me with the tidings that she had promised to become your wife."

"A story, Wynter? Well, tell on."

He seated himself beside me, and smiled kindly down upon me.

"There were once a twin brother and sister," I began, with tones that faltered and quick-beating heart, "who loved each other very dearly. The brother was sickly and weak-hearted, and had depended upon his sister's loving care all his life long. Her brave hopeful words cheered and encouraged him, when, but for them, he would have been dejected and downcast indeed. There was no sorrow which she did not soothe by her sympathy—no joy in which, for his sake, she did not rejoice. No words could do her justice, no words could tell how much her brother loved her. Morning and evening his thought was of her, his prayer that at some time some act of his might give her happiness. The story I told Annabel ended there, Lord Kindair, but I have more to tell you."

He looked at me with wondering eyes.

"Proceed, Wynter," he said, gravely.

"There came a time when, to save her mother and brother from becoming exiles from the home which had been handed down from father to son for generations, she consented to become the wife of a man to whom she gave her utmost reverence and trust, but not her love. That had gone from her keeping many a month before, when a brave young soldier went out to Russia. She had heard that he died there—that he was killed upon the battlefield—and I know now that to her it must have appeared as though all that made life pleasant and desirable died with him. But she bore her sorrow bravely and well; no duty was neglected, no attention she had been wont to pay to her brother ceased."

I paused and glanced at Lord Kindair, but he did not speak.

"It was not thought needful to tell the new lover this. The wooing went on prosperously; all things were ready, even the day for the wedding was appointed, when suddenly the girl's old lover appeared before her."

A low cry broke from Lord Kindair. I dreaded to look towards him.

"It was a painful meeting," I resumed, hesitatingly. "The brother, who was present, knew then that, although she might keep her promise and faithfully perform every duty, she would never be happy now that she knew the man she loved was living. Thinking over this, longing intently to help her, a golden thought came to him. Relying upon the noble generosity of the man to whom his sister was in honor bound, he would tell him all, and ask him to release his sister from her promise."

There was utter silence now. So still was the room that the rustle of the leaves in the garden sounded distinctly.

I looked up at Lord Kindair. His face was white and stern.

"I cannot pretend to misunderstand you," he said, hoarsely. "Who is the man your sister loves?"

"Hubert Heron," I replied.

"Have you reflected on the consequences to yourself, supposing I comply with your wish, and release your sister from her engagement?" he asked.

"I shall have to leave Leigh Place," I said; "but that is nothing if Annabel's happiness is secured."

"Not only Leigh Place will you have to give up," he returned, "but the hope of health and strength. Think well of it, Wynter—think how welcome it would be to move about at will without pain or assistance."

"I have thought of it," I cried; "but, Lord Kindair, I can be brave as well as Annabel."

As I spoke the door opened, and Annabel, followed by my mother, entered the room. Her face was deathly white, but her manner was quite calm and composed. Straight to Lord Kindair she walked, and stood before him.

"Robert," she said, quietly, laying her hand upon his shoulder—and I saw him wince under its gentle touch as though it pained him—"I have something to tell you. I think it right that you should know."

"Spare yourself the recital, and me too, Annabel; I have already heard what you have to tell," he said.

"If you have heard it from Wynter," interposed my mother, angrily, "his zeal

in the matter has far outrun his discretion."

"Annabel," said Lord Kindair, never heeding my mother's words, "why did you not tell me of your love for Hubert Heron?"

He was looking eagerly at her; a brilliant carmine dyed the face which but a minute before had been so white.

"Wynter was not mistaken then," he continued. "You do love him. It was no idle fancy, forgotten as readily as a dream. Why have you not dealt honestly with me? You have treated me unfairly."

The dark eyes were raised to his then—raised with a pleading expression.

"Do not reproach me," she said. "Indeed I will do my duty. I acted for the best."

"Duty?" he cried, passionately. "That will not satisfy me. It is like giving a stone to the starving."

She broke down then, sobbing convulsively.

"Bear with me a little," she pleaded, wearily. "Indeed I will try to make you happy—I will give you no cause for reproach."

"When men of my age love," he returned, bending over her, and speaking kindly, "they do not love lightly. My love for you has been the one passion of my life. I do not think you need to be told how deep and true it is—it is so true, so tender, Annabel, that I prefer resigning the hopes which have been so dear to me to holding you to your promise, now that I know another will always hold the first place in your heart, and that marriage with me cannot bring you happiness."

He must have seen the light of hope which flashed into her eyes.

"And so," he said, sadly, "my dreams of happiness end here, and yours begin anew. Wynter," he added, turning to me, "it was for love of you, I find, that Annabel consented to become my wife; and now, for your sake, I release her from her engagement to me."

As the brave noble words fell upon my ear, I wondered if Annabel had acted wisely in casting aside the love of such a man even for Hubert Heron.

"Wynter," he said, abruptly, "do you suppose this young man is still in the neighborhood?"

I replied, and with truth, that I could

form no idea; in our stormy troubled interview I had not thought to ask.

"Never mind," he said; "doubtless he will easily be found. Annabel," he said, "the wedding must take place as if this had not occurred, only there will be a change of bridegrooms; and you must spare me Wynter. In another week he and I will be on our way to Germany; it is but a little thing I ask you." His voice was becoming hoarse and unsteady. I could see that he was fearfully agitated. "Hush, hush!" he said, as she would have spoken grateful tearful thanks. "I cannot quite bear that yet."

There was another brief interval of silence, which no one attempted to break.

"Good-by, Annabel," he cried, suddenly; "good-by, my love!"

He bent over her and pressed a passionate lingering kiss upon her lips, and then hastily left the house.

Throughout all my mother had spoken but once—those few angry words to me. Doubtless she was at a loss what to say, or how to act. Sorrow for Annabel and Hubert she would surely feel, but that the engagement between her and Lord Kindair should be broken off was an event for which she was entirely unprepared. Affection too was wounded as well as pride; for she cared for Lord Kindair second only to her own children, and grieved for his evident pain. Moreover, the thought of the gossip which would ensue when the circumstances became public must have been extremely distasteful to her.

We were a silent party for the remainder of the evening. My mother never addressed either Annabel or myself, and at last retired without bestowing her usual "good-night" kiss.

Morning brought her a long letter from Lord Kindair, and a box for Annabel. The box contained a casket. Annabel's tears fell fast as she examined the contents. All the jewelry he had selected for her in the days when she was his betrothed wife was there. Diamonds and pearls, emeralds, rubies and sapphires, lay side by side. A short note accompanied the gift. The letter to my mother enclosed the title deeds of Leigh Place, which he begged her to accept; it also made all necessary arrangements for my accompanying him forthwith to Germany.

I never saw the letter, but I know it must have been like the writer—noble. There were traces of tears on my mother's proud calm face after reading it—an unusual tenderness in her manner sprang up both to Annabel and myself.

Hubert came in the evening—he, too, had had a letter. Lord Kindair had readily ascertained where he was, and had written to him, telling him everything—telling him that "he had resigned all claim upon Annabel, all hope of one day calling her his wife." It was a good letter—one that none but a thoroughly generous, unselfish man could have written. From that hour Lord Kindair had no more ardent admirer than Hubert Heron.

That evening I was glad with a gladness no words can express—glad when I looked upon Hubert's and Annabel's happy beaming faces—glad in watching the shy love-light in Annabel's bonnie eyes, the expression of restful content on her sweet face; but in the midst of my joy my thoughts would revert to the master of Melbourne Court in his lonely rooms, mourning over his vanished dreams of happiness, his crushed hopes, none the less because he had acted unselfishly and nobly.

The next week Lord Kindair and I set out for Germany. The kind thoughtful manner was unchanged, but he was very quiet, very grave; he never spoke of Annabel, and the letters containing the report of her marriage he read without comment. A dear and valued friend he became to me, gentle and tender as a woman, almost filling Annabel's place in my heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

Twelve years since I told my story to Lord Kindair, twelve years since he sacrificed the love of his life for Annabel. Twelve years—and what have they borne in their flight? Sorrow to some, gladness to others, changes to all. I came back from Germany cured. Delicate I shall ever be, but I can walk any easy distance. I need not tell of Annabel's delight, of my mother's proud thankfulness. "Only one wish of her heart is ungratified," she says—"he should like to see the lady who will be mistress of Leigh Place after her." Ah, well, who can say what a day may bring forth? A dainty form, with a winsome witching face, and eyes of forget-me-not hue, in fancy stands beside me even now. I hear the sound of a gentle low-



toned voice, I feel the touch of a soft tiny hand, and the glad hope fills my heart that when summer roses bloom, and the perfume of lilies fills the air, and sweet clover decks the meadows—when the hum of insects, and the low of cattle, and song of birds render Leigh Place a home to be desired—my mother's wish will be gratified—I shall bring home my wife.

Lord Kindair is yet unmarried. Handsome still, an expression of sadness now rests on his face in repose which it was not wont to wear. None know better than I how true were his words when he said "his love for Annabel was the one passion of his life," how hard it was for him to resign her to another. The affection which

sprang up between us when I told him my halting incomplete story has never lessened; a warm kind friend, a truly noble man, even Hubert cannot rival him in my esteem and love. When he is at Melbourne Court, Leigh Place and Heron Vale have no more frequent visitor, none that is more warmly welcomed and revered.

And Annabel and Hubert are happy—happy in each other, happy in their children. Heron Vale echoes with the patter of little feet, the music of childish voices. If no other joy were mine, the joy of witnessing Annabel's happiness would content me; for dear to me as in the days when no other love came near us is Annabel, my twin sister.

## MY UNCLE'S SON.

BY E. J. WHITNEY.

"If I do not marry according to my uncle's wishes I receive only the interest of the property until I am twenty-five." I repeated, mechanically, as the lawyer read my father's will in his measured tones.

"Do rouse yourself, Claire, and hear the handsome provision your father has made for you," whispered my uncle. "And do stop this everlasting crying, and try to look a trifle animated."

I shivered as if I had received a blow under these heartless words.

The guests were scarcely gone when I was summoned to the library.

"You are eighteen, I believe, Claire," began Uncle Harding.

I bowed.

"You understood the conditions of your father's will," grimly.

I bowed again.

"Well, it's no use to mince matters—I have a husband picked out for you."

"Indeed! You might have spoken to the clergyman to perform the ceremony as soon as he had finished the burial service," I retorted, bitterly.

A dull red leaped to his thin face, as he said, coldly:

"We will not discuss the question, if you please. My son will finish his European tour by the time you will enter society."

He rose as if tired of the interview. My breath came short and hard, as I steadied my trembling voice.

"Then I am to have no voice in the matter, sir?"

"It is for your good and—his," he said, slowly.

I had not seen my Cousin Marcus since I was a child; but my recollections of him were not pleasant. He was ten years my senior, and delighted to tease me, because it made me "smart," he said. And a good many whippings I got on account of this very smartness, in consequence.

"I won't marry any one I hate, if my uncle does say I shall," I sobbed, as I gained my chamber.

I fell asleep at last from utter exhaustion, and awoke quite hopeful the next morning. A year was to elapse before the forced wooing began, and no one could tell what might happen in that time.

"It's no use to borrow trouble, especially as I have a heavy burden already," I thought, as the tears fell fast.

"Marcus will be here to-night, Claire, so look your prettiest," said my uncle, about fifteen months after my father's death.

"As for marrying Mark Harding or any one else I hate," I exclaimed, as I gained my room, "I'll run away first, or do something desperate. O dear, what did make papa make that horrid will? I don't care a fig how I look, if he has just come from Europe."

After a little pause, occupied in arrang-

ing my hair that would persist in standing up, I resumed, more calmly, as I nodded to myself in the glass:

"It's no use to fret, Claire Stuart; perhaps his mightiness won't stoop to look at your gipsy face. I won't look like a fright anyway."

So I put on my most becoming dress—a pink tissue with snowy Swiss overskirt—and waited nervously for the summons to the parlor. It came at last, and I went with a beating heart and cheeks aflame.

A pleasant-faced gentleman standing by the window turned as I entered. His puzzled look gave place to an admiring recognition, as he came forward and took my hands, saying in a musical voice:

"It must be my Cousin Claire!"

"And you are Mark!" I exclaimed, involuntarily.

"The same old Mark who teased you so unmercifully," he laughed, boyishly. "I give you fair warning that I haven't forgotten that naughty trick, even yet. I claim a cousin's privilege after my long absence," he went on, softly, as his mustache brushed my cheek.

Half angry, and wholly confused, I stammered painfully, as he led me to a seat and leaned over my chair.

"Where is your pet Rocinda?" he asked, his eyes on my burning face. "She isn't dead, I hope?"

"No. She is old and gray, but she hasn't forgotten how to use her claws when she is teased," I retorted, laughingly.

"You naughty little cousin to remember my bad qualities and forget the innumerable good ones," he exclaimed, playfully pinching my cheek.

"Wait till I see the last-named ones," I answered, saucily.

He made a laughing reply, and before I was aware, I was chatting merrily with the man I was going to hate. But somehow I could not hate this merry debonair gentleman, with his flashing eyes and pleasant ways.

I thought it all over after I retired, and was heartily ashamed of myself. All the heroines I had ever read of—and their name was legion—would have hated him with the concentrated hate of a dozen like your humble servant. I wasn't a heroine, to be sure, but I would be cool and haughty, and let Mark Harding know I wasn't going to drop into his arms like a ripe peach,

I thought, and then went to sleep, and never once thought of my resolution for several days.

As the summer advanced the old house was filled with company, but somehow I was happier when Cousin Mark was the only guest. I never thought Lily Westbrook was so bold and forward until then. She openly admired Mark, and wore her prettiest dresses and most bewitching ways. Then Mina Burns was even worse than Lily.

Mina was a sparkling little blonde, with long flossy hair filled with shimmering lights, and her pansy-colored eyes were soft and beseeching as a child's. She appeared quite fond of me, and was full of Mark's praises, but they didn't sound a bit pleasant to me, although I scolded myself soundly for it.

Lily talked poetry and travels, and Mina played the guitar and sang passionate love ballads. I could not make up my mind which he did like best, although I watched him closely.

"He is my cousin, and I feel a cousinly regard for him," I told myself, frequently.

We were having an impromptu picnic one lovely golden afternoon, when, becoming weary of the insipid conversation, I wandered down where the grand old woods grew close to the musical river.

I had been there but a few moments when I heard voices, and peeping from my leafy bower, I saw Lily Westbrook and Cousin Mark conversing earnestly.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked, eagerly, and there was a strained set look on his face.

"Certainly. You know she was there several weeks. It does not take long to fall in love—sometimes," softly.

They walked away as I stole quietly out of my hiding-place. In doing so, however, my foot slipped, and I was precipitated into the water. My head struck a rock as I fell, and I knew no more until I felt Mark's arms around me, and heard the cry of, "My darling, my darling!"

I was conscious of being borne rapidly away, and then all was dark around me.

It was three weeks before I left my room, but Mark never came near me. He sent me flowers and fruit, and I could hear him question the nurse about me, but I did not see him until I was able to leave my room, and then he avoided me. His charming

pleasant ways were gone, and he was haughty and stern.

And as I turned to Hugo Bernly for sympathy and appreciation, I would see a strange expression on his face, and sometimes he would be absent for days. Hugo was an old playfellow of mine, and he was engaged to one of my dearest friends, so we always had plenty to talk about.

The summer guests were gone at last, and Mark accompanied Mina Burns to her home. I was quite sure they were engaged, and many were the bitter tears I shed. Yes, it had come to that at last. Pride could not keep me up when I was alone, although I would have died before I would have owned it.

It was a dreary rainy day and the wind sobbed mournfully as it whirled the changing leaves far and near. I had wandered into the library, and fallen asleep over a book of poems, when I was aroused by hearing Mark's voice. My heart throbbed heavily, for I thought he was far away.

"Yes," he was saying, bitterly, "false as she is, I love her better than life."

"I think it very improbable that Claire would become engaged clandestinely, but I can easily ascertain," touching the bell as he spoke.

"For Heaven's sake, father, don't say anything about it," exclaimed Mark, pacing the floor excitedly. "If she chooses to keep it secret a while, she is at liberty to do so."

"I am her legal guardian," was the calm reply, "and I shall positively forbid it."

"I will leave the house if you do," cried my cousin.

"You forget Claire is very wealthy, and under my control until she is twenty-five, or, I give my consent to her marriage," coolly. "Now I shall never give it unless she marries you."

"I would die a thousand deaths before I would marry for money, or take an unwilling bride," Mark burst out, impetuously. "Money is far enough from my thoughts, thank Heaven!"

"When you reach my age, you will lose your romantic notions, and find that the money you scorn now is the end and aim of existence," with slow scorn.

"Send Miss Claire here," he said, as the servant answered the bell.

In a few moments she returned, saying I was not to be found.

"Very well," said my uncle, quietly, as he left the room.

Mark bowed his handsome head and groaned bitterly. Now was my time to leave, I thought, and I stole noiselessly to the door. Just as I turned the knob, Mark raised his head, and our eyes met. In an instant his arms were round me, and I was crying:

"I heard it all, and I'm not engaged!"

It was sometime before we could talk coherently, and then Mark said Lily Westbrook told him I was betrothed to Hugo Bernly.

Well, you all know the rest, but I will say, there is not a happier couple in the world than Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Harding.

## MY VOYAGE WITH THE SCOT.

Coomer, George H

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## MY VOYAGE WITH THE SCOT.

BY GEORGE H. COOMER.

"April, sae fitfu', sits and greets,  
O'er heathy Brenston braes,  
While auld Ben Lomond shaws afar  
His sair worn winter chaes.  
But soon nae cove shall shield yon barque,  
That's moored at Greenock quay,  
Nor soon shall house-tree bield yon group,  
On her thranged decks we see!"

WHAT a gale we had off Malin Head! What a crashing of bulwarks and splintering of spars! The May Queen went up the Frith of Clyde with a couple of topmasts doing duty as fore and mainmasts, and an old top-gallant yard for a mizzen-mast. She was dreadfully wrenched, and her timbers withal being found much decayed, the underwriters condemned and sold her at Glasgow. It was more from whim than necessity, that I went on board a Scotch ship instead of an American. She was called the Cambuskenneth, and bound for Philadelphia. We dropped

down the Clyde to Greenock, and there took in the dozen emigrants who were to be our passengers; the Cambuskenneth, from her amount of freight, being unable to accommodate a larger number.

Never did I feel a deeper interest in human nature than when those people first stepped upon our decks. It was to them an event almost like a change of worlds. Yesterday, the dear hearthstone of home—to-day, the unsteady plank, the wondrous cordage, and the broad St. George's flag! Some were from the Lowland scenes of Lugar and Doon, others, from cliff and lake in the nooks of the rugged Highlands.

One group I especially remarked. It consisted of an old man of seventy years, a girl of eighteen and a little child of four. They were Highlanders. The old man had long yellow locks, interwoven with gray; and in the traditionary plaid, and with a certain

weird expression of countenance, he looked a minstrel of the days of Roderick Vich Alpine Dhu—a very Allan-banè. The child was a hazel-eyed beauty, that one could have folded forever in his arms without growing weary; and the young girl was love itself. So watchful for her two companions—so careful for the feebleness on either hand—her young heart had a double charge. I soon learned from the remarks of a passenger, that those at her side were her grandfather and her sister, and that her name was Margaret Gordon.

They stood on deck, as the heavy topsail-yards were swayed up, and the ship began to move. From the bustling quay came the last sounds of Scotland. The stout seaman at the wheel steadied his helm; the eddying wake astern grew more and more distinct; the courses were sheeted home, topgallant-sails and royals set, and we were wide out from Greenock. A shrill wind from the northwest made the Frith of Clyde look dark and angry, all the more so, that the white ridges of its myriad waves contrasted so strongly with its rugged field of blue. On the starboard beam was the Isle of Bute, and on the larboard stretched the coast of Ayrshire. Arran was neared and left astern to starboard, and now, upon the larboard bow, rose gray old Ailsa Craig, a thousand feet high. Soon it bore abeam, then on the quarter—and O the hearts that watched it! I looked toward the young passenger, Margaret Gordon; tears were raining from her eyes. She lifted the child that it might look on Ailsa Craig and the far off shore of Ayrshire. Though a stranger to the scene—enough that it was Scottish. The dear old land was fading away forever!

She uttered no word; there was only that bitter rain of tears that would not be checked. But a girl at her side, a young creature evidently from the Lowlands, and only less beautiful than herself, murmured in heart-broken accents:

"Bonnie Doon, sae sweet at gloaming,  
Fare thee weel before I gang!"

The sad and lovely lines were electric. Instantly Margaret placed the little Jessie on the deck, and the two young women, utter strangers to each other until this moment, rushed to a close embrace, weeping hysterically while each was folded closer and closer in the other's arms. The passengers all

caught the infection; they had been sad enough before, but now they wept aloud.

As we rounded the Mull of Kintyre, the ship was going like a race-horse; and now the broad swells of the North Channel, striking her abeam, began to swing and rock her like a cradle.

"How lang will sho rock sae?" asked a passenger, as I came near him.

"From thirty to sixty days," I replied; "but it's smooth water here!"

"I wad I were pit ashore by yon licht-house!" he exclaimed, indicating the great lighthouse on the mull. "O Scotland! Scotland!"

It seemed as if the Scottish eyes caught at each fading object, as a condemned prisoner might catch at moment after moment of respite from his doom; and now every gaze was directed toward that prodigious lighthouse, three hundred feet high, which beacons to the mariner from the Mull of Kintyre. But wider and wider grew the dark expanse between. The mull itself was lost, and the lighthouse became a speck. Pitching and rolling; and flinging showers of spray away out to the end of her jibboom, hauled close on the wind to the westward, the stout old ship dashed on. It is all over:

"Bute, Arran isle is passed;  
Scotland fareweel! for Ailsa Craig  
Is out o' sight at last!"

The wind now began to head us off, as on the starboard tack we stood across the North Channel toward the coast of Ireland, and we knew that the order would soon be given to stand by for stays. It came in the broad Scotch of Captain McDonald. We hauled up one clew of the Cambuskenneth's mainsail, and then, tramp, tramp, tramp, ran the sons of the sea, some to the sheets and tacks, others to the after-braces.

"H-a-r-d a-leo!" roared the old Scotch captain, and the ship's head came up as Jack McPherson's wheel went down. "Tacks an' sheets!" and the serpent-like slatting of the fore-tack answered him. "Maintopsail haul!" Tug, tug, tug—a dozen men at the brace—and the mainyard came creaking around. "Let gae an' haul!" Helter-skelter we jump to the fore braces; the foretop sail fills away, and the Cambuskenneth is on the port tack, up and off!

It might have been but imagination, yet I fancied that Margaret Gordon was regarding me with an appearance of unusual interest,

as I ran hither and thither among the sailor boys, whose "aa heave ho!" as they lay stoutly back at stubborn sheet or brace, was so unwonted a sound to her ears. Perhaps I reminded her of one whom she had known, and her heart reached forth for sympathy.

Wider and wider grew the North Channel, till between Isla and Malin Head rolled in the white caps of the Atlantic. Scotland had become a dull faint cloud a-lee, while to windward, though out of sight, we knew lay Irish Londonderry. And now the first and second mates, mustering all hands aft, chose their respective watches.

"Donald McGregor!" said the first mate, and a broad-breasted Highlander stepped to the port side of the deck.

"Robert Roy!" said the second mate. "The vera auld chieftain himsel', wi' a marline-spike for a claymore!" he added, as the freckle-faced sailor shuffled to starboard.

"Archibald Douglas!" said the first mate.

"Jock McLeod!" said the second mate. "I ken na but ye may be 'Jock o' Hazel-dean!'"

"Robert Burns!" said the first mate. "Ye hae mickle names amang yò, I maun say it!"

"Hoot awa'!" cried the captain, who stood looking on; "hae ye nae gatten auld Sir Walter, noo, Mr. Duncan, to pit him in the starboard watch as an affset to Robble Burns?"

"Na, na, sir," laughed the second mate. "Mr. Hume has gatten the rhyming chiel, an' there's naething but common folk to divide atween us noo. Ye had frae over sea, step to starboard—ye're as braw as ony o' the lave." So I found myself in Mr. Duncan's watch.

The two officers then went on dividing the McKintrys, McKenzies and McIntyres, till one might have imagined himself in the camp of James the Fourth, on the eve of Flodden. Scotland was represented, in the Cambuskenneth,

"From the southern Redwire edge,  
To farthest Ross's rocky ledge."

There were besides among the sixteen hands, four English Jordys, with the mind and body of the lobster.

Next morning, the blue ocean stretched all about us—no Ailsa Craig, no Mull of Kintyre, no Malin Head. I was at work in the maintop when Margaret Gordon came on deck. She wore a modest little Scotch cap, with a pheasant quill placed aslant at the front, and the Highland "plaidie" lay about

her shoulders. Its checks were small and bright—red, white, blue and green. I thought of those Highland "lassies" of whom my Scottish shipmate, young Allen Ross, used to tell me. But I, too, had seen them among their mountains, at a time when shipwreck compelled me to seek shelter with the hospitable Highlanders.

What a form and face to be found on the rude deck of a ship! Did she feel a coquetish pride in the bright plaid and feather? Surely she might do so, and yet be pardoned. But no—custom had made the bonnie plaid familiar to her eyes, and she was as indifferent to her plumage as a wild bird. Now a large porpoise shot out from the crest of a sea close to the ship, and was followed by a dozen others, all "blowing" loudly as they tumbled into view. Instantly I saw the little Scotch feather at the bulwarks, while the hazel eyes looked wonderingly over as the dark swinelike objects wallowed along. She called her grandfather to see them, and held up the little four-year-old, as she had done when looking at Ailsa Craig, but with a lighter heart. She had begun to take interest in scenes from which there was no escape, and it would be better than dreaming always of the Highland heather.

Once or twice I caught her eyes fixed upon me as I stood in the top, but they were quickly averted—those Gaelic eyes, so beautiful beneath the little brown feather and the golden hair. I felt, too, that she was speaking of me to the lovely young girl who had repeated the lines to "Bonnie Doon" on the day previous, and whose name I discovered to be Mary Campbell. Their acquaintance had ripened very fast, or rather it had been instantaneous. Mary looked curiously up at me while her companion was speaking, and then, unconscious that I observed her, addressed some remark to Margaret, at which they both smiled—a kind of April smile, the first ray of sunshine after their tears.

During my watch below in the afternoon, a Highlander, as communicative as he was inquisitive, came and sat on a chest in the fore-castle, asking "a' about the mickle ship an' sle' like things." From him I learned something of Margaret Gordon. She had no mother, he said, and was going to meet her father in America. Her only brother, a sailor boy, had died in a foreign land, "an' the twin o' her wee bit sister," continued the Scotchman, "was stown awa' by gipsy bodies. There was an unco search for her; ye may

depen', but a' in vain, an' it's some two year sin'. Margaret was sair sick, and puir Dame Gordon died outright wi' the sorrow; an' when Sandy Gordon, the father, found he couldna recover his wee bairn, he did, what he had lang been dreaming o'—

“Rolled his hurdies in a hammock,  
And o'er the sea.”

Margaret Gordon and Mary Campbell had at intervals been slightly seasick, and the little girl considerably so, hence all had kept the deck more than would have otherwise been the case, as they found relief in the open air. On the evening of the second day out, the wind hauled exactly aft, and the ship, going off with studding-sails on both sides, rolled tremendously. What a sight for a landsman! High up in the pale moonlight were the royals; close to the deck tugged the courses; and to starboard and larboard, the winglike studding-sails bent and strained the booms. With a swift but easy motion, the long yards, now to port and now to starboard, went down to the very foam, while ever and anon came the shudder of jib and staysail, and the slat of the foretopsail, as the head sails were becalmed by the others.

It was now that I made an accidental advance toward an acquaintance with Margaret. The passengers were all on deck, many of them having been tumbled out of their berths by the roll of the ship. Some ran to the captain, inquiring if there was “nae muckle danger,” little dreaming that the present state of wind and weather was exactly what he desired.

“Guid save us!” cried a dame, “we shall a' gae bottom up! It rolled me topsy-turvy out o' my bed to the ither side o' the biggin, an' afore I could get hauld o' anything to help me, it rolled me back again an' pit me to bed!”

“Lay up the slack of that stun's'l sheet!” said Mr. Duncan. “Wha the de'il left it a' adrift in that way?”

While I was doing this, the Cambuskenneth rolled prodigiously deep. Margaret lost her hold of the opposite bulwarks; there was a quick forced run of little feet across the deck, and a plunge into my arms. What a thrill was mine! I had the Highland “plaidie” and the sweet form it enfolded. The little Scotch cap lay against my shoulder, and the “bonnie feather” touched my hair. Up came the Cambuskenneth on an even keel, but the ice of restraint was broken. Hence-

forth, I might at least nod at the Highland lassie.

That night I dreamed of my former shipmate, Allan Ross. I thought that he led Margaret to my side and placed her hand in mine. When awakened by the cry of “starboard watch, ahoy!” my first thought was of him. But poor Allan was dead; the yellow fever had claimed him.

Our brig, the Caribbean, lay at Port au Prince, when I spread the American ensign over his form as he slept in death.

In the morning watch, still thinking of Allan and my dream, I picked up a small article at the spot where I had caught the Highland girl, and was bewildered to find it a miniature of myself in a locket. I had surely on board this ship possessed! nothing of the kind. Long previous, when in Scotland, I had procured such a picture and had it set in a locket for my mother, but it was lost with my chest and clothes when our ship went ashore on the coast of the Western Highlands. Could this be the same? Had I left it buried in the deep, to be dropped from Margaret's plaid on the deck of the Cambuskenneth? How wonderful all this seemed to me, and what a history must the little picture have! I would keep it an hour or two and await the result. I had abundant food for fancy—the incident of the previous evening—the midnight dream of that small snowy hand—and now, more than all, the locket! I was thrilled with a feeling that only a very romantic lover can imagine. Again I recalled every incident of my sojourn in the Highlands. I longed to take Margaret in my arms and tell her that we would go back to her own hills and heather, never to leave them more. I was more Scotch than the Scotch themselves, and as the shadow of old Ben Lomond fell athwart my dream, I exclaimed aloud:

“Look where yon mountains meet;  
The clouds are thick around their head,  
The mists around their feet!”

“Ye amais't carry ane back to the auld lan', wi' your mountain sang, laddie,” said a voice at my elbow, and I turned to find that the old grandsire, whom I have likened to Allan-bane, had overheard me.

“Ye are na Scottish born, as I am tauld,” he continued. “Hae ye been in Scotland at any time afore this last?”

“Yes sir, I was wrecked to the southward of Skye, two years ago.”



"An' ye lost bag an' baggage, may be, laddie?"

"Indeed, I did, sir."

"That was hard, indeed! And did ye hae any wee bit trinket about ye, as ye min'—a canny likeness o' yoursel'?"

"I did, sir, and it went with the rest."

"Na, na, laddie, it didna gae wi' the lave; it was fand by Sandy Gordon, my ain sin, and his bairn has it noo, my grandchild, yon."

"I'm afraid you mistake, sir, she surely cannot have it now."

"Margie, Margie," he called, as she passed us, apparently looking for something she missed.

"Is this it?" I asked, producing the locket.

Margaret's face became scarlet, like the red cheeks of her plaid. But soon she related in her sweet Scotch, how her father had found it near the scene of a wreck, and how she had been struck with surprise at meeting the original of the picture. She had been speaking of it and showing it to Mary Campbell, and having forgotten to put it away, had dropped it on the deck when she fell against me. I insisted upon her keeping it, and she consented to do so. There was evidently something in the incident that pleased her scarcely less than it did myself. From the fragments of conversation that I overheard during the day, I felt that Mary Campbell was rallying her on the romantic episode; yet Mary herself was a sad-hearted girl, and I heard enough to make me aware that she was troubled by some unhappy reminiscence.

"Ah weel, ah weel, sae it maun be!" she sighed.

"It is na weel to tak' on sae," replied Margaret. "Dinna greet, dinna greet, Mary lass! Dinna blame yoursel' sae; ye hae naething for to blame. Ye canna help it noo; ye meant nae ill, an' I'm sure he ne'er blamed ye; he wouldna, he couldna blame ye—sae dinna greet mair! Think how wonderfu' that we twa should sae hae met!"

"But if he was here!" replied Mary, "an' gauging wi' us to the new war! O Margaret, it gies me sic' grief!"

"He was my ain brither," said Margaret, "an' I hae sair greeted for him. Ye canna feel mair than I. I am a' alone but for my grandfather and my wee sister. I hae greeted for the little aye stown awa'—for my mither dead—for my father in a strange lan', an' for him that ye lo'ed sae weel. Sae ye maun see, Mary, that ye hae aye for a frien' as wae fu' as yoursel'. But we maun a' do the best we can, wi' what is left us."

Poor Margie! how my heart ached for her, as in those sweet Scotch sentences she uttered a soul history so sad. Again I thought of Allan Ross, and recalled the affection I had felt for him. How delighted he would have been with the simple loveliness of these two Scottish girls! He was their countryman, and they would love to hear of him. I had his miniature in the forecabin, and when the starboard was relieved, I overhauled my dunnage for the likeness of poor Allan. There it was in the sailor jacket and trousers, just as I had seen him so many times on the main deck. I told Margaret that I had a likeness of one of her countrymen, a shipmate and favorite of mine. She took it from my hand, then raised her eyes as if about to speak; but she was deadly pale, and I caught her as she was falling insensible. Mary Campbell grasped the picture.

"It is Allan," she cried, "it is Allan Gordon!" and weeping she sat down on the deck, her long locks falling loose over her form, while she sobbed and moaned.

"No, no," I exclaimed, "this is the picture of Allan Ross, not Allan Gordon!"

"Allan Ross Gordon!" said the white-haired grandsire. "It is the puir, puir laddie! He is dead an' gaue; we hae been tauld o' it, an' I doubt na it is ower true. Sae he was a shipmate o' your ain, laddie," and the old man grasped my hand. "Tell us o' him—tell us what ye hae kenned o' him!"

Then I told old Grandsire Gordon how Allan had fallen sick at Port au Prince; how, on the morning of our sailing thence, he had died in the hospital, and I had spread a folded American ensign over his silent face, because, though a Briton, he sailed beneath our flag. The brig Caribbean had returned to New York without him, and the tidings of his death had been sent thence to Glasgow—his full name having been obtained from the brig's papers. Sailors stand little upon their surnames, and I had never called my shipmate anything but Allan, though it was said in the forecabin that his name was Allan Ross.

The romance of the miniature, and the discovery that I had been a shipmate and friend of her brother, wrought between Margaret and myself a bond of sympathy that could not be sundered. I related to her my wanderings among the Scottish hills; and soon with a glad exclamation, she recognized the picture of one of those Highland homes which I described. It appeared that I had

crossed her father's threshold and partaken of his fare. But it was two years since; the old grandfather was not present, the little Jessie and her twin sister were mere babies, and Margaret herself might have been performing "a canny errand to a neebor town."

Allan Gordon had been Mary Campbell's lover; they had parted in the midst of a petty quarrel, and she had seen him no more. It was for this that she so bitterly reproached herself, and it was her love for poor Allan that so endeared to her his relatives, though at the moment that Margaret and the Lowland maiden first rushed into each other's arms they were, as I have said, mutually strangers. Their meeting was a singular coincidence—one of those wild sweet scenes that at long intervals occur on emigrant ships.

After a few days Grandsire Gordon predicted a tempest. He felt it in "a' his banes," and he had a "vision o' it" besides. He had frequently done so in the Highlands, and the second sight had proved "ower true." It came, indeed, exactly as he foretold, and Margaret had the opportunity of looking upon a real gale at sea. Captain McDonald hove the ship to under the close-reefed maintop-sail, main spencer and fore-topmast-staysail. Soon he ordered the staysail to be taken in, though against the advice of the chief mate, Mr. Hume.

"Na, na," he persisted, "it keeps her aff too mickle—it maun come in." So we lay out and furled it.

But Mr. Hume was right. No sooner had the staysail come in, than the Cambuskenneth headed up so much that the topsail was thrown aback. The ship got sternboard and swung away to leeward, describing a large half moon.

"The tapsail maun come in too," said the captain.

"Aweel, sir," said Mr. Hume, "if it maun, it maun, but she'll get a weather roll, wi' only the spencer on her."

We furled the topsail, and Mr. Hume's words were again proved true. In the trough of the sea, the spencer was becalmed, the ship's head fell off, and she rolled heavily to windward, taking the full force of the sea square upon her decks.

"Get the tapsail on her again, Mr. Hume, and rouse up the staysail!" cried the captain, as soon as he could get his head above water. "If she will gae to the de'il she shall gae in her ain way!"

The two sails were again set, and the old Cambuskenneth rode like a duck. I heard Mr. Hume remark to Mr. Duncan:

"The auld man maun hae his whims, but the ship knows better than himsel'. Never tak' the maintapsail aff a ship, Mr. Duncan, till ye hae her alangside o' the wharf!"

The gale passed away. Among its notable incidents had been the washing of the captain's great dog into the main rigging by a sea, and the loss of Margaret's Highland cap, as during a consternation among the passengers she put her bright head out of the companion-way, while we were sheeting home the main-topsail. Poor little Highland feather! far, far to leeward it went dancing along the foam. The old dog was brought up by the shrouds and ratlines, and almost choked by the slack of a reef-tackle which caught around his neck. But sadder things were marked in his destiny, and happy for him had he perished here!

On several occasions subsequent to this, Grandsire Gordon predicted gales, and the second sight proved always true. Once, he foretold our narrow escape from an iceberg, and when some three hours later it loomed close on our lee bow, the sailors looked upon with a superstitious wonder, as if he dealt with demons. They seemed to forget that a presentiment tending to our preservation must be inspired rather by a good than an evil spirit, and as we had an unusual number of tempests, they were attributed to the unhappy influence of him who foretold them.

Especially was this true of the four Jordys. Bred in the coalingships of Shields and Newcastle, "the de'il" constituted their sole idea of an invisible presence—and he, a black, smutty monster, all covered with coal! These four men were the worst portion of our crew. The Scottish sailors had no trouble between themselves, but "Jordy Ben" or "Jordy Bill," or some other of the four North-of-England-men, was always up for a fight. They went at all work growling, turned in and out-growling, and swallowed their food growling. They threatened to pitch Grandsire Gordon overboard, should he predict any more head winds or gales. The old man, however, knew nothing of their feelings, nor had any of us an idea that they would execute their threat.

The captain's great dog, Bruce, was usually very affectionate toward all hands, but at length his mood changed and he lay sullenly about the deck, growling if disturbed. At the

same time, it was told forward that the old Highlander had seen a vision of an enormous black dog coming in over the bow. This, the Jordys said, was "the de'il," but they failed for the time to associate the apparition with any danger to be apprehended from the captain's dog. Neither did the seer himself perceive the nature of the calamity foreshadowed by his vision.

On the following evening we got among drift ice. We had now been out forty-eight days, and were about a hundred miles to the eastward of Cape Race. The weather fell calm, and the ship's side at length grated against an ice island that rose seven or eight feet above the water and stretched away for a mile. At first we attempted to tow her clear of it with our boat, but finding this out of the question, we put down "fenders" to keep her from chafing, clewed up the sails, and moored with kedges to our unwelcome berth. The sea was smooth, with the exception of an almost imperceptible swell; it was foggy, and there was a prospect of the same weather for days.

It was not long after we had made all secure that the captain's dog snapped at Jordy Bill, tearing the after portion of his ill-fitting trousers from the bunt away down to the clew. This was an unprecedented act on the part of Bruce, and sickness or insanity was evidently the cause of it. Then, for the first time the Jordys spoke of the Scotchman's vision as connected with the poor animal. Grandsire Gordon, they said, had enticed the devil on board, and he had entered into old Bruce. Still they said nothing to the seer himself.

The Cambuskenneth was an old-fashioned ship, of seven hundred tons. She had no house above-board except the galley, and the quarter-deck ran flush with the main. Old Bruce lay in a coil of rope on the booby-hatch. At last he rose suddenly up, whirled around, barked, whined, snarled and snapped his teeth. Next, he rushed forward of the mainmast, rose on his hind legs, spun around like a top, and uttered a terrific howl. Then with a leap aside, he commenced raging about the deck, jumping up at the rigging and snapping at everything in his way, while the foam flew in all directions from his jaws.

"Mad dog! mad dog!" resounded fore and aft, and the men sprang for the rigging. "Grandfather! grandfather!" I heard a sweet, frightened voice exclaim from the cabin doorway, and the answer came from forward,

"Are ye safe, Margie? Keep in the cabin, I'm weel out o' his way! Shut 'the cabin door and keep in!"

Night had fallen, and though the northern nights at this season are comparatively light, the thick fog combined with the dusk so obscured everything, that the raging animal looked like a great black ball bounding about the deck. Again I heard Margaret, who had evidently moved the cabin slide enough to make herself heard, calling to know if her grandfather was really safe, and the voice of honest Jack McLeod came from the fore-rigging in answer:

"Ay, ay, miss, he has gane intil the fore-castle wi' some o' the lads, an' they hae pit on the scuttle. He is safe enough; the tyke canna get till him."

"Shut the slide!" cried Captain McDonald, from the mizzen shrouds, "or ye'll hae the brute hauld o' your hands!" And we heard the slide close, Margaret being satisfied of her grandfather's safety.

The dog now had entire possession of the deck, and from the taffrail to the night-heads, from the night-heads to the taffrail, over the windlass, around the wheel, among coils of rigging, and casks, and buckets, and henceoops, he tore at a mad, blind, terrible run. At last, down he fell, and rolling upon his back, lay, as nearly as we could discover, motionless.

"Noo for it, lads!" cried the captain. "Lay down to the deck an' gie him a handspike afore he gets under headway again!" A dozen men came with a bound out of the rigging and rushed for the handspikes.

"Quick, lads, gie 't him!" And the captain himself led the way, weapon in hand.

We were close upon the poor creature, when gradually drawing up his feet, he scratched the hard deck with a convulsive sweep of his paws, and bounded four feet high! An attack by all hands might have overcome him, yet no man was willing to be first; and the result was that almost by a miracle we again found ourselves unhurt in the rigging, though Mr. Hume lost part of a boot top of red leather! Bruce now commenced trotting fore and aft—his wilder frenzy having settled into the tireless mad-dog space—that endless pat, pat, pat of his feet. He snapped his jaws spitefully till every coil of rigging was bitten, as around and around the ship he went, close under the bulwarks. Twenty times I saw that sable, shaggy coat pass under me. Trot, trot, trot—

would he never fall down again? The wind began to spring up, and soon the ship would be thumping against the ice. Something must be done! A simultaneous attack by all hands was suggested—but then, to be bitten by a mad dog! We drew up our feet again! The handspikes had been dropped when we sprang up the rigging, therefore we could not strike him as he passed beneath us. At length Mr. Hume suggested a plan and acted upon it.

Swinging himself out of the main shrouds, he threw the coil of the fore-topsail-brace from its pin, and getting back into the rigging drew up the slack and made a running noose. He then stood by for the dog, and as poor Bruce again came around, cast it over his head. Two or three men now laying hold of the rope, they hauled the dog clear of the deck, made the impromptu halter fast to a shroud, and the unhappy creature's misery was soon ended.

A strong breeze was now blowing, and not a moment was to be lost in getting clear. The wind blowing from the direction of the iceberg, we had only to run up the jib and let fall the foresail. The *Cambuskenneth* at once swung off, and in a few minutes we had her under good headway with the topsails set, keeping, however, under short sail on account of the ice and the fog. But now arose a fresh cause of anxiety—Grandsire Gordon was nowhere to be found. Margaret sought through the ship for her grandfather, and when she had failed to find him either above or below, she wept in so piteous a manner, that both crew and passengers were greatly affected at her distress.

"My poor grandfather!" she cried. "O that it had been myself, instead o' him!"

But how had he been lost? Jock McLeod had seen him enter the fore-castle, but how many of the men entered with him it was impossible to say. All had been confusion. Not a man could be found who would confess having been in the fore-castle, though one or two of the hands thought that they had seen Bill come up through the scuttle after the dog was killed. But he denied it. He was in the foretop, he said, and Jordy Ben was out on the mainyard; and the other two were likewise aloft. None could swear positively to the contrary; yet certain it was that when the old Highlander sought shelter in the fore-castle, he was not alone. But what then? He could not have been murdered there, for it was utterly impossible to convey his body

on deck and get it overboard unseen. The points established were—that the old man went below, and that he had not since been seen to come on deck.

In the morning, Captain McDonald and Mr. Hume went into the fore-castle. The ship had previously been in the Quebec trade, and had a large lumber-port in the bow, the fastening consisting of a crossbar through a staple. It was this lumber-port that the officers went down to examine, and they found that the bar had been lately moved.

"Jordy Bill was down here, I am ower sure," said Jock McLeod, "but I canna swear to't."

There was abundant proof that the North-of-England-men had threatened to throw the "old Scotch wizard" as they called him, overboard, and now there could be little doubt that they had pitched him out of the lumber-port. Captain McDonald was moved beyond expression.

"To think," he said, "that sic' a thing should happen aboard my ship! The puir auld man! An then that beautifu' grand-dochter an' the wee little bairn—it makes my heart ache! I've o'en a min' to swing the villains up at the yardarm!"

He had spoken thus much, when right over our heads there was a heavy thud on the deck, followed by feeble groans. We all rushed up and found that Jordy Bill, who had gone aloft to secure a gasket which was dangling loose, had fallen from the fore-top-sail-yard, and was fearfully hurt.

"Tak' your hands frae him, lads," said the captain. "Never gie him a finger's help till I hae fand the truth. Whare is auld Gordon, mon? Tell me quick, or ye's nae get a han's help. The ghaist o' the puir auld grandsire has tripped your fit, and the de'il himself will hae ye afore nightfa'! Your a' aback for this war!, sae tell me afore ye dee!"

In a feeble voice the Jordy confessed all. Himself and his three countrymen had found themselves below with the old Scotchman. The Highlander fell into a kind of trance, and exclaimed that he saw the little Flora, the sweet twin grandchild that had so long been lost. He opened and folded his arms as if to receive and embrace her; then sank back unable to speak further, while his form seemed to become rigid. This was like the description which Margaret had given me of her grandfather in his inspired moments. The Jordys taking advantage of his helplessness and silence, forced open the lumber-port

and threw him out; thus ridding the ship of a supposed wizard. But Jordy Bill said that the old man did not fall in the water, for just at the ship's head the jagged ice made a slight angle, reaching out under the bow. We all remembered this circumstance, and also that Captain McDonald had thought of hauling the vessel astern. It was on this projection, as the Jordy told us, that Grand-sire Gordon fell.

Margaret was almost frantic with suspense at this revelation. While her grandfather's fate appeared absolutely settled, she could only weep in heart-breaking grief; but the new dawn of hope, with still a terrible fear that it was all in vain, tortured her outright.

"Cheer up, my young frien'," said the kind old shipmaster, "we may na find him alive, but I'll pit the ship about an' gie a guld look for him. The fog's gane now, an' we canna be muir than twenty mîle frae the ice-fiel'."

We went in stays accordingly, and when the tacks were boarded, with the ship standing to the eastward, and every stitch of canvas set, while we had one "lookout" at the fore-royal-mast-head, and another at the main—we seized upon the three Jordys and put them in irons. Their companion was already dead, and when another hour had passed, we launched him overboard.

"Ice, O!" soon came from the royal-yards, uttered simultaneously by the two "look-outs," and the excitement on deck told what sympathy had been awakened for Margaret and her poor old grandsire. The passengers clustered around her, speaking kind words and bidding her hope. Convulsively she threw her arms about little Jessie, as if afraid that she, too, might vanish.

"He was ay guld to us, my puir little Jessie!" she said, "an' sae dearly, too, he lo'ed the wee darling that is gane!"

"How does it bear frae us, Jock?" hailed the captain.

"The leeward edge o' it, sir, is about a point aft the weather bow."

"Aweel, I'll keep her as she gangs," he said to Mr. Hume. "Gif the auld Hielan' mon is alive an' weel, he maun be pleased wi' the sight o' our top-hamper!"

"There's a hale crew o' people on the ice, sir!" came now from the main royal.

"They hae just appeared frae behint a ridge, sir, an' are rinnin' to the side," said the man at the fore.

"Twenty or thierthy—an' there's women among them, sir!" said Jock at the main.

The southern portion of the ice-field bore east by north, and we were standing due east, with the wind northwest. It was Captain McDonald's intention to run past its southwest point and round to under its lee. But now Donald McGregor sang out from the fore-royal-mast:

"Boat, O! About a point forward of the weather beam, sir!"

We immediately hauled up north by east, leaving the ice about three miles to the leeward, and stood for the boat, which was five miles off. She proved to be the yawl of the Irish brig Cathleen. Her crew informed us that on the previous night, the brig had struck an iceberg and instantly foundered. When the fog cleared away they attempted to reach a vessel to the north of them, but failing in this and discovering the Cambuskenneth, they pulled towards us. They were twenty-two in number, men and women, and had left seventeen others on the ice, besides an old man whom they found there. All this we learned as they scrambled one after another up the side.

"Heaven be thankit!" exclaimed Captain McDonald, turning to Margaret, "the auld grandsire is safe! sae greet na mair, lass! An' here," receiving in his arms a little girl from the boat, "is anither little lassie that will hae need o' hovering! Hoot awa', noo! but there's aye mickle like ye, aboard the ship, sae ye's no be lonesome."

There was an astonished cry from Margaret, and springing forward she caught the little stranger in her arms—no stranger to her! It was Flora, the stolen twin of Jessie! The captain of the Cathleen explained that a gipsy family had taken passage with him from Cork for Halifax; but that, with the exception of this beautiful child, they had all perished among the broken masses of ice. The old Highlandman, he said, whom he so strangely discovered, recognized the little girl with the first light of morning—indeed, he appeared to have been expecting her, having seen her in a vision; and though he had suffered much on the ice, he had all a Highlander's contempt for hardship.

"When we left the iceberg in our boat," said the captain, "with the intention of either intercepting the vessel we saw or making Cape Race, the old man prayed us to be 'unco tender o' the wee bairn, an' sen' ward o' her to Sandy Gordon, in the States.'"

And now, assured of her grandfather's safety, and overwhelmed with joy at the re-

storation of her who seemed to have rained down from heaven, Margaret could look with rapture toward the ice-field. We wore around southeast, and passing the south-western corner of the ice, came up in the wind with our head to the westward. Soon old Grandsire Gordon trod the deck, while Margaret, and Jessie, and Flora were all smothering him at once with their dear faces and arms.

We now bore up for Halifax, to land the Cathleen's people, but next morning fell in with a British frigate and transferred them to her.

"There's ane that maun na gae wi' them!" said Margaret, playfully, clasping little Flora. "O, to think how it might have been! But for the bad Jordys, and the cruel ice, and the kind Captain McDonald, how sulr would hae been my heart to-day!"

With the strangers gone, the Cambuskenneth stood southwest. Mary Campbell was glad for her friend, but her own sadness appeared even heavier than before. If Allan could have lived to meet her—but now, who would welcome her to the new world? How often had Allan sailed in a ship like this. How often he had responded to the cry of "eight bells!" how often stood at the wheel, or laid out on the rocking yard.

The Nova Scotian coast was left astern, Cape Cod was passed, and the shoals of Nantucket bore east-north-east. But now the sky thickened, and a fierce easterly storm was at hand. Already it blew a gale.

"We canna wark out o' this bight o' the coast," I heard the captain say to the mate. "We maun either gae in or gae ashore. I'll keep the topgallant-sails on her, an' what she canna carry she maun drag!"

But he presently changed his mind. Darkness came on, accompanied by such violent flaws that at last he consented to compromise with the elements by clewing up the fore and mizzen topgallant-sails and the mainsail. Margaret and Mary came to my side while I was coiling a topgallant clewline on its pin. They had caught the fears of their fellow-passengers, and I was glad to reassure them.

"The star that you see under the foresail," I said, "is Cape Henlopen Light, and we are standing for Delaware Breakwater. In an hour we shall be at anchor."

A day later an item in the ship news

started Sandy Gordon down Delaware Bay in a steamtug. It was this:

"Below, at the Breakwater, ship Cambuskenneth, McDonald, Greenock, fifty-seven days."

Nor was Sandy Gordon alone. Great was my astonishment, I might almost say terror, when my well-remembered shipmate Allan climbed from the steamer to our deck. Margaret and Mary stood for a moment speechless, then threw themselves frantically upon his breast. Soon he explained all.

Immediately after my leaving him at Port au Prince, he had manifested signs of life. It was the turn of the fever. Upon recovering, he left Hayti in a vessel bound in search of the treasure of a wreck sunk off Porto Bello. He obtained as his share some two thousand dollars, and on arriving at Philadelphia, learned from his father that none of his letters had been received, though he had written several.

What bliss for Mary Campbell! She was again the singing bird that she had been by "Bonnie Doon," and none could have supposed that Allan and herself had ever been estranged by a "wee bit" lovers' quarrel.

The good old ship, now taken in tow by the steamer, was walked straight up the Delaware, and soon there was the gesticulating and "singing out" consequent upon hauling into berth.

"Avast hauling with your headline! Haul away on your stern hawser! Let go that line aboard the brig, then—come up with it, with it, I say!"

And now the yards overshadow the wharf, the jibboom reaches to the stern of the next ship, and the spanker-boom is almost as foul of a brig's flying-jibstay. The Cambuskenneth seems hardly the same ship in which I have been pitched and tumbled for fifty-seven days.

Grandsire Gordon was provided with a pleasant home, where little Jessie and Flora played at his knee. Allan and Mary were soon married. As to Margaret and myself—why, to-day my little ones are all Highlanders, for their mother has told them so often of the mountaineer, and how he

"Around him threw  
His graceful plaid of varied hue,"  
that they wear their pretty aprons for tartans, and fashion miniature claymores to their own liking.

## NANCY OF THE HILL FARM.

BY HELEN LUQUEER.

HARRY AUSTIN got up one lovely June morning, and while dressing himself glanced now and then down into the garden below.

"Come, Jay, get up," said he. "These people are not used to keeping the breakfast-table waiting, I imagine, for any one until this late hour, and beside, the morning is heavenly."

"What a jolly old place it is!" laughed Jay Canfield, from the bed where he lay yawning. "This old, weather-beaten, tumble-down house has very much the appearance of having been dropped down from past ages into this wilderness of shrubbery, lovely in bloom, and fragrant as the air of Eden. I catch sweet breaths floating in at the open window where I lie."

"But get up, for goodness sake, Jay, and poetize the rest of the day for all I care. I feel as if I could eat a whale, and my soul is panting to investigate the surroundings, and hie away to the trout stream the old farmer was talking about last night."

"Nancy!"

"O Lord! what a voice, and what a name!" exclaimed Jay, suddenly arising. "It knocks sentiment and poetry all to tatters."

"It's Mrs. Hatch, our lowly hostess, the farmer's wife, calling to that lovely niece of hers," replied Harry, stretching his head out of the window.

An expression of disgust crossed the handsome face of Jay Canfield, as he stood before the very diminutive looking-glass tying his cravat, as he answered:

"Thank Heaven, we did not come up here with the desire to find rustic beauties. If we had we should be most sadly disappointed, for I never saw such a set of coarse homely women in my life, as presented themselves all along the road up from the station, and Mrs. Hatch and Nancy are the ugliest of the lot. Darn the glass?"

"What is the matter?" laughed Harry.

"It's so confounded crooked that I can't part my hair straight to save me."

"Never mind. It is in keeping with the carpet. Did you ever see anything like it, Jay?"

"Often. It is what they call in the country a rag carpet. Like Joseph's coat of many colors, it is, I think, in very bad taste. Cleanly scrubbed floors are infinitely to be preferred, according to my mind."

"But why in the name of common sense couldn't they have massed their colors, and made the thing with some slight regard to artistic principles?"

"It is what they could do most easily, and is called, 'hit or miss.'"

"And missed it every time!" laughed Harry, as he led the way down to the great barnlike kitchen where breakfast was waiting for them.

Mrs. Hatch was going about her work with a frown upon her face, that her city boarders concluded was in consequence of their tardiness, but which was habitual. Life to her was a dreary waste, and everybody poor dying mortals. Funerals and camp-meetings were a godsend. To hear sinners consigned to eternal perdition by wholesale, and neighbors to the grave, gave her a fresh opportunity to groan and sigh for days afterwards.

Jay attempted an apology for being so late, bringing as an excuse the fatigue of the journey of the previous day.

"It haint nothin' tu me if ye choose tu lay a bed and miss the poolyest part of the mornin', and eat a cold breakfast instead of a warm one. The loss is your own, I s'pose," and the rattling of the shining milkpans she was washing in a sink at the other end of the kitchen effectually drowned any reply her new boarders might choose to have made.

"Nancy," called she, "be you goin' to churn this mornin'?"

"Yes marm," came in smothered tones from the regions cellar-wards.

"'Cause if you had jest as lief, Jeff can do the churnin' while you make some green currant pies. I've got tu mold up this here bread. It's gettin' tu light."

The gentlemen finished their breakfast, while Mrs. Hatch and Nancy arranged

their plans for the day, and gladly betook themselves away from the discordant tones and unpleasant topics. As they strode down the verdant mountain path, with fishing-rods upon their shoulders, Jay broke the silence with:

"I mean to ask Mrs. Hatch if she wont give me my breakfast in a napkin and permit me to find some mountain retreat where I can eat it, for I'll be blessed if I can endure the constant rasping of her voice; and, besides, who wants to see and hear the movement of all the squeaking cog wheels of their domestic machinery? If I am to have rhubarb and green currant pies, I should enjoy them just as well if Mrs. Hatch didn't inform us how they were to be made."

The two young gentlemen had sought this secluded mountain farmhouse for a quiet home during a couple of the hottest summer months. Fishing and seclusion being their object as well as the fine scenery, both being artists, each proposed selecting some view and copying it for the fall exhibition.

When they returned to a late dinner, they found, to their astonishment, their room in the most immaculate order, and a few days later had each chosen the subject for their picture and worked steadily.

Jay Canfield had selected a view of the old house (from a higher elevation) nestled in a sea of green, with its barns and granaries beyond, its broken straggling fences and moss-covered stone walls, and one day as he and his companion were returning from sketching they caught a glimpse of Nancy ascending one of the mountain paths.

"That girl has not a bad figure, despite her ill-fitting gown," said Harry.

"No, nor a bad face, save for its pallor and immobility of feature," returned Jay. "Let me see. We have been here ten days, and I believe I have not heard her utter a dozen words, and I am positive she never smiles. Such a grim cold face one rarely sees in so young a person. Then, too, her hair would be beautiful upon another head—as the poet has it:

"'Brown in the shadow and golden in the sun.'"

"Yes," replied Harry, "if in place of stretching it straight back and knotting it into an ugly wad at the back, she would let it ripple and wave as it should and as

it wants to do, it would be very fine indeed."

The smallness of their bed-chamber, and the quantity of luggage they brought with them gave little room for work, so the parlor was offered to them gruffly by Mrs. Hatch, at her husband's request, and here they spread their drawings and gave touches to their pictures when the day was too hot or showery to be abroad.

Once upon returning they surprised Nancy, dust-brush in hand, standing opposite the easel upon which was the unfinished picture of Jay. So absorbed was she in the contemplation that she did not notice his entrance. Thinking, in her ignorance and uncultivated taste, that she would of course see nothing but beauty in the most common daub as well as this effort, he said:

"Admiring my picture, are you, Miss Nancy?"

She turned a flushed and startled face for an instant upon him, while her steel gray eyes flashed at his patronizing tone and manner.

"No sir," she returned, shortly. "I am not admiring your picture."

"O, indeed! Will you be so good as to tell me why you do not like it?" And there was a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"It is too green."

"It is at least true to nature. The old house is almost swallowed up by its wreath of surrounding foliage."

"Nature isn't always beautiful, and the view at this season is one of its ugliest. I like it with the neutral tints of autumn. Then it would make a lovely picture; or, as a winter scene, cold and bare, like some lives, without a winning attribute or single attraction. But—"

As if suddenly recollecting herself she again flushed up to the temples, and with downcast eyes stole from the room, leaving Jay Canfield rooted to the spot with chagrin and surprise. Upon relating the episode afterwards to Harry, he said:

"Who is this plain country girl who talks of 'neutral tints,' and learnedly compares desolate lives to a dead white winter scene? Really, her words were eloquent, earnest and grammatical, and her voice low and not unmusical."

"Some princess in disguise, no doubt," laughed Harry. "You may go in raptures if you will, because the girl does not talk



bad grammar like her dismal relative in the kitchen, or because she may have a bit of common sense wrapped up in that unemonstrative, frigid body of hers. But as for myself, I beg to be excused from even the ghost or shadow of interest in the rustic maiden. The fact is, she is not my style."

But, in spite of his friend's raillery, Jay found himself constantly watching Nancy as she moved about her work, her face shaded by a great sunbonnet, so that he could hardly ever catch a glimpse of it which had revealed its self-experience, and was almost beautiful when bending over his picture. She seemed more than ever to shun every one, was intent upon her work, rarely ever speaking, and always absorbed and moody.

"I'm not in the vein for anything but idleness," said Jay, one day, "so suppose we go fishing?"

Harry acquiesced, and they were soon threading the shaded paths of the coveted trout stream. They had often observed a more obscured trail than the one they usually followed, and as it also led downward and toward their destination, and being in an exploring mood, they abandoned the old and well-tried one for the new. But after a half hour's walk they found themselves, to all appearance, as far from the fishing-grounds as ever, and near some rude habitation. A straggling fence shut in a small garden, with a little cabin keeping guard over the small domain. Everything was weedy and overgrown. A deep dell or ravine was between them and the cottage, the foliage about dense, and they were looking for some means of crossing the stream (which at some periods of the year must have held brawling waters), when their attention was arrested by the approach of some one, and both instantly recognized Nancy of the Hill Farm.

She came along with her peculiar light swaying and easy motion, which even Harry admitted was graceful, despite the hoopless gown which clung to her. Unconscious of their presence, she paused upon the very edge of the chasm, and, reaching up, caught the limb of an overhanging willow, and with a sudden spring, landed safely upon the opposite side.

Jay Canfield and his companion held their breath as she accomplished the dangerous feat, saw her enter the cottage, and

presently come out again, leading an old woman whose groping manner and trembling shuffling steps proclaimed her to be blind. Placing an easy-chair in the shade of a giant butternut which towered over the little dooryard, Nancy seated her helpless companion, and began to adjust her cap and smooth her hair, and make other little alterations in her toilet.

Harry was just about to step forth from his concealment and ask of Nancy the direction to the brook they were in search of, when Jay interposed with:

"I'm tired. Let us rest for a few moments." And he sank upon a half-decayed log.

"I'm agreed," responded Harry, "especially as we have the unexpected vision of Nancy in the new role of a Sister of Mercy."

"I couldn't come earlier," said Nancy, pinning the white handkerchief in neater folds about the neck of the old woman; and then seating herself at her feet, she continued, "There was more than usual to do. It was baking-day, and Aunt Betsey cross and provoking. And I cannot spend too much time out here, for I must get back before tea-time, and your bed requires making; and something must be devised for your supper. What shall it be?"

"O Miss Nancy, let it all go. When Simon comes home he will git up something. You just talk to me every blessed minute. O, how I have longed to see you, deary!" And her trembling old hand sought the soft brown hair of the girl at her feet with a reverential and caressing touch.

"Do you know, Mrs. Buel, that coming to see you every day is the only pleasant event in my life, and I shall miss it when I am gone, as I know you will?" And she took the old and wrinkled hands in her own fine and flexible ones.

"Gone?" repeated the old woman, in a subdued whisper.

"Yes, gone, my dear Mrs. Buel. I am really going away, at last, but not until you are cared for. I have already secured the services of a young girl, whom I will pay as long as she remains with you."

"May Heaven bless you, my dear Miss Nancy! If you will be happier I ought to submit cheerfully, but—"

Springing to her feet, Nancy exclaimed, with a voice almost harsh and discordant:

"Happy? How often have I told you, Mrs. Buel, that there was no such thing as happiness in the world? It is a miserable cheat and delusion. I hate the very term, and any human being who professes to believe in or enjoy it. They are hypocrites and liars!"

Her attitude was that of a tragic queen—her glance went over and beyond the worn face and sightless eyes raised with mute depreciation to her own.

"When I think of it," she continued, apparently speaking more to herself than her companion, "when I think of what the world calls society—the silly women, eagerly believing young girls, whose souls are wrapped up in the gewgaws of fashion, and the conceited puppets dancing about them in masculine attire, whom they fancy possess hearts—the creatures who in a year after marriage neglect and disgust their wives, who must still ever wear the smile of happiness upon their faded faces, like withered flowers upon a corpse, I can scarcely restrain my feelings. Talk to me of happiness! I tell you it is but an empty sound—a tinkling cymbal. The whole world may go on in its mad dance after the will-o'-the-wisp they call happiness, but as for myself, I'll seek misery and the wretched for companionship. Were Aunt Betsey less dismal and woebegone—less unhappy than she is, I would not have made her home mine. And were you, Mrs. Buel, less an object of commiseration, with the blank sightless life before and around you, I should not be here now. I tell you misery likes company."

During the latter part of the speech her attitude lost its frigidity, and seemed to melt, as it were, while her voice softened from its hard and metallic ring and high pitch, and sinking again to the feet of the old lady, a pensive expression rested upon her face.

"Sing to me, my poor child. There is rest and happiness in heaven, thank God. Sing me something of that land."

Dropping her hands into her lap and lifting her face upward, looking beyond the towering forest trees, Nancy sang "Bear me away on your snowy wings," with such richness of voice, such pathos of accent and manner, as to bring tears to the old sightless eyes, and to others she wot not of, on the other side of the little chasm. As she concluded, she arose and entered the

cottage, and began her work of preparing for the comfort of the helpless old creature and her husband, who labored all day upon the Hill Farm.

Feeling very like culprits, Jay and Harry stole away; and when fully out of sight and hearing, Jay broke the silence.

"I feel as if I had been witnessing a fine tragedy. What do you think of this girl now?"

"By Jove! you are right, old fellow. She is, indeed, no common person, and the world and fashionable life nothing new to her; though I can't conceive why she should settle down as a drudge here."

"There have been some dark passages, ay, and bitter ones in her life."

"She is an enigma I don't care to solve. The voice of a nightingale—the talents of a Siddous, and the tastes of a washer-woman are incongruities I cannot reconcile with my ideas of a lady or womanly refinement."

After this Jay ceased almost entirely to work upon his picture, and lay idly about, apparently reading, but in reality endeavoring to catch stray glimpses of Nancy, who was, as usual, shrouded in her sun-bonnet. And one day, as the young men returned from a tramp over the hills, Mrs. Hatch seemed more cross and dismal than ever.

"You'll have to take things arter this about as ye kin catch it, I reckon," she groaned. "Nancy up and left all of a sudden."

The gentlemen not only expressed their surprise, but looked it.

"Yes," continued her husband, as he seated himself at the supper-table, "she is a queer creatur. It's jest about a year ago since she lighted down, or rather up, here. She is my sister's only darter, and was born in some heathenish country—I disremember where—but believe it was France."

"She is your niece, then?" ventured Canfield.

"Yes, and her mother was a great scold before her, and married above her family, and went over to the old world and lived and died there. Her child, Nancy, she tells me, travelled for years with her father. She was educated in a convent, and to my mind, that's what makes her so queer. She said that her mother told her that my Betsey had the unhappiest disper-

sition she ever knowed, and if yer believe me, she said if 'twant for that she would never have sarched us out."

"Is her father living?" questioned Harry.

"Don't know. She said he was dead ter her, and that's all I could find out. She had lots of money, but that didn't make no difference. She wanted to larn to do all kinds of housework, and wanted to stay and work for her board, and a right smart hand she proved."

"That's what yer always sayin'," snapped Mrs. Hatch. "You never took inter account the batches and batches of bread, pies and cakes she spiled afore she larned anything; and now, just as she got ter bein' useful, she ups and leaves. Never tells a body where she is going, nuther." And she set the black earthen teapot down with a slam that threatened its utter destruction.

Days passed, and life at the Hill Farm grew unbearable. The pastry which had always been so delicious from Nancy's hands was miserable, plainly showing that she had improved upon her aunt's receipts. And added to many other discomforts were the constant fretting and grumbling of Mrs. Hatch. Jeff, the boy of all work, now became the object of her continual wrath, and Jay Canfield, having lost all interest in painting and trouting (with his friend Harry) sought other scenes. They were among the earliest to return to the city, and soon were engrossed with its business and pleasures, although Jay constantly dwelt upon Nancy of the Hill Farm as he saw her at the cottage of the poor blind woman, and sleeping or waking he was haunted by the sad and exquisite song she sang so divinely.

One evening he attended a fashionable party. As he entered the elegant and brilliantly-lighted parlor, he was conscious of a flood of melody rising and swelling in waves of sound delicious and intoxicating. A lady sat at the piano, dressed in a robe of rich gray silk, lavishly trimmed with costly lace. Rare jewelry was sprinkled in her soft bright wavy hair, and upon her white and shapely hands. A knot of gentlemen had crowded about and almost hid her. Yet Jay caught at one glimpse all the details of the exquisite form and attire. Unconsciously, and as one in a dream, he drew near. At that instant the song

ceased; the lady arose amid the thanks and plaudits of her surrounding admirers, and turning with a haughty inclination of her head, walked away, leaning upon the arm of the host. Then Jay recognized Nancy of the Hill Farm—though as unlike that personage as a butterfly to a grub—so much for surroundings, and dress, and great power of acting.

Later in the evening he stood before her receiving a formal introduction to "Miss Bethune," and the next moment they were promenading. The unpleasant pause was first broken by the gentleman saying:

"Dare I claim an old acquaintance in Miss Bethune?"

"If it is worth your seeking, Mr. Canfield?"

"I think it is, as I learned to respect and revere you in a humble situation."

"I was particularly unhappy, and wished to find the most honorable and at the same time wretched home, and the experiment was a success." She laughed, as she spoke, revealing, what he had before noticed, a rare set of teeth.

As they parted that night he received permission to visit her. She was staying with some friends just then, but expected soon to go South for the winter. Jay's infatuation was complete, and the one visit became many, and at last, upon a propitious occasion, he found himself with his heart in his hand at her feet. The pale troubled face of Nina Bethune (as her friends called her) grew very rosy as he pleaded his love.

"I am not worthy this honor," she said, feelingly. "I had thought my heart was dead, and every hope blasted. But one short year ago, if any one had predicted that I would even have listened with patience to the vows of man, I would have laughed the idea to scorn. But you have won the remnant of this heart of mine; and after you have heard my story, if you still wish to link your life with mine, I consent."

She told him of her engagement to one who had proved false even at the last moment, while she stood in her bridal robes and with her brow covered with orange blossoms. The guests came, but no betrothal. At that very hour he was being whirled away with another as fast as steam could convey them. He had eloped with one of her most cherished and intimate

friends. Added to this overwhelming trial and mortification was the marriage of her father—her only parent, to a woman vain and capricious, and who at once began making her life wretched by her jealousy and petty persecutions. In conclusion, she said:

“I resolved to leave my father’s home before the influence of his wife had quite annihilated his love. I had money and position, but having drank deep of the bitter cup of sorrow and disappointment, until my very nature seemed to have turned to gall, I could not endure society. Its hollow pretences and harsh criticisms were intolerable. Remembering to have heard my sainted mother speak of her humble relations of the Hill Farm, and of the unhappy disposition of the wife her brother had married, the strange fancy seized me to seek them and find refuge and rest in their quiet home. I found pleasure in their monotonous life. Its drudgery took me out of myself somewhat, though I was conscious of a growing and morbid hatred of everything human save those who suffered like myself, either

mentally or physically. I discarded everything I used to delight in—thought myself dead to things of beauty forever—and loved to dress in the coarsest and most uncouth garments until you came, bringing with you the odor of the world I had abjured. The refinement, so striking by contrast with my relatives, and the surroundings, once more allured me, and discontent crept in with the ghost of past memories, and Aunt Betsey and her home grew intolerable. So I left and dashed once more into fashionable life, and Fate—white-handed and inexorable Fate—that goddess of joy and sorrow, has drawn our lives together, to be united, if you will, for I am powerless to resist—for—I—

“What?” questioned Jay, holding tightly her two pretty hands within his own as she faltered, with her voice sinking into a low and sweet whisper.

“I fear I have learned to love you.”

“Enough,” he exclaimed, folding her to his heart. “Heaven bless you, darling. Henceforth it shall be my joy to make your life bright and happy.”

## NAN'S PELARGONIUM.

BY AUGUST BELL.

### CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG girl ran up the broad stairway to Nan's room, her hands full of fragrant white daffodils.

"I'm coming right in, dear," she called out. "I have something sweet here to make you wake up."

"I'm not asleep," said Nan, reaching for the flowers. But the daylight was shut out of the room by yellow damask curtains, and Nan Van Lew herself lay among soft pillows on the sofa, still in her pretty embroidered camisole, her hair half unbound, with last night's puffs and powder not yet brushed out of it.

"It is like a dream-palace in here!" exclaimed her Cousin Gertie. "You don't know how bright the sun is outside, and, only think, I found these daffodils blooming out in that mite of a grass plot behind the house. It does seem so good to see a flower growing in the city. You dear, dear little white daffodils!"

"Put them in the vase, Gertie, do," said Nan, twining her pretty hands above her head, as if she were tired of everything. "Did you see the splendid bouquet I brought from the party last night? Look at it, if you want to; it's somewhere there on the dressing-table."

"O Nan, who gave it to you?" asked Gertie, caressing the camellias and rosebuds, admiringly.

"I'm sure I don't want to remember!" said Nan, wearily. "I believe it was Captain Darrell; he was the first gentleman I met as I came from the dressing-room."

"Who danced with you, Nan? and how many times did you dance? Do tell me all about it," pleaded Gertie, with the enthusiastic curiosity of sixteen.

"Reach me my card of engagements then," said Nan, rousing a little; "there it is tied up with white ribbon. Well, first was the Portland Fancy, and that I danced with Captain Darrell, of course. I couldn't do less, because of the bouquet. He's such an indolent, handsome, flattering fellow, I'm sure I hope he don't mean half he says. Before I hardly knew it I had promised him at least two dances at Mrs. Bocage's party to-morrow evening. And that's such a bore, to be engaged beforehand. It makes it look so marked, just the thing I want to avoid. What's the next on the card, Gertie?"

"Galop quadrille," said Gertie, all eager interest. "These pencil marks are blurred so I can't read them, but it looks like Mr. Dimock's name."

"Just so," replied Nan, half smiling; "you have seen him here to dinner. He's fifty years old, and quite fine-looking, you know, besides the charm his fortune gives him. He is rather stout, but I believe he dances all the better for it. He took me down to supper, too, and saw that I had plenty to eat,

which is more than half of them do. One gets hungry dancing till midnight, Gertie."

"The next was the Caledonian," said Gertie, studying the card.

"O yes, that I danced with young Roberts, a duty dance, because he was son of the hostess. And isn't the next a polka redowa? Harry Meade was my partner in that, and, Gertie, he's perfectly lovely in the redowa. I'd rather dance it with him than any one I know, except, of course, dear old Phil, if he were here. O dear!"

"O Nan," said Gertie, quickly, "did you see any of his family? did they say anything about him?"

"Yes, his two sisters were there, Rosy and Maud. How Maud Stevens does flirt! I couldn't get near her, but Rosy and I had a little talk in the corner, and she says they haven't heard one word from Phil yet, and they are afraid something dreadful has happened. Only think, Gertie, four long months, and they used to hear by every steamer. Of course, I don't want to show how much I care, and I know Rosy thinks I'm heartless, for right in the midst of our conversation up came Captain Darrell for a waltz I had promised him, and I had to smile and be as gay as possible, and go whirling off in his arms."

"O Nan, I am so sorry. How hard it is!" murmured Gertie, who was the most sympathetic of confidantes.

"Ah, but that isn't the worst of it," said Nan, with a darkening face. "Uncle had me in the library yesterday for a full hour, while you were out walking, and told me pretty plainly that all he invited you and me here to live for, was to get us well settled in life. As I am oldest, I must go first, and he scolded well because I had let the winter pass without being engaged. Of course, he wasn't really wrathful and threatening; you know the odd joking way he has of putting everything; but there was a determined look in his eyes that made me feel he was in earnest beneath it all. He says if I don't choose some one else in less than a month he will tell Mr. Dimock he may have me and welcome. He likes Mr. Dimock, you know, thinks he's such a substantial man, and so forth. I don't know what to do, Gertie. I'm half worried to death. If I could only hear from Phil! But there, there's no use fretting; perhaps he is a flirt, and don't care a pin for me."

"O Nan," said Gertie, impulsively, "don't ever feel that way. Phil will come back, and you will marry him, and it will all come right."

Nan smiled a little wearily. "You're just at schoolgirl age, Gertie, and all the romances you read 'come right' in the end. If I were a three-volume novel I should expect to go through everything and end in happiness. But real living along from day to day is a different thing. I hate myself for lying here in this nerveless way. If I get up and dress, Gertie, will you go to walk with me? I wish we could walk, and walk, and keep on walking till we got to California, or somewhere!"

"If shoes only wouldn't wear out," said Gertie, looking at the roughened toe of her boot. "I'll tell you where we'll go, Nan; let's go to the greenhouse, and look at all the plants and flowers. You don't know how polite the gardener is, and it is such a lovely place. I want to buy some pausy roots, too, and it will be such a good opportunity."

"Very well," replied Nan, springing up, "I will go, and have a quiet morning, and forget all about Uncle Ben and Mr. Dimock. I mean to forget everything for once, and make believe it is all coming right. I'll be ready in ten minutes, Gertie; run and get on your hat."

In half an hour more Nan Van Lew, in her dainty walking suit, with her bright-eyed young Cousin Gertie, went leisurely along the main street, enjoying the fresh spring air, and the budding beauty of the trees, which were just beginning to show their tender green leaves.

A tall elegant gentleman passing down the other side of the street raised his hat to Nan.

"Who is it, Nan?" asked Gertie. "He is very handsome, but I don't like his looks exactly. He don't look as if he would be in earnest about anything."

"Maybe not. That's Captain Darrell, Gertie. But here, isn't this the turn we take to reach your greenhouse?"

"Yes, it's just around the other corner," said Gertie, taking the lead now. "There, we are just coming in sight of it. Just see all those terraces on the side hill, and imagine how beautiful they will be next summer—one brilliant blazing mass of flowers! I know just where the ribbon beds are to be, and where all the different colors of phloxes will be set. Those mounds are full of gladiolus bulbs. Won't they be splendid in July and August, Nan? Mr. Wray told me just how he had grouped them, when I was here last time."

"Is Mr. Wray the gardener?" asked Nan,

smiling. "You and he seem to be excellent friends, Gertie."

"O, he is very kind to me," said Gertie, frankly; "and he seems like people I used to know at home, before I came to live with uncle. All our friends earned their own living one way or another, and they seemed straightforward and honest, just as Mr. Wray does. When uncle's visitors come they make me feel awkward and frightened, but people like Mr. Wray put me perfectly at my ease."

"Spoken like a champion, Gertie!" said Nan. "But here we are at the gate. Is that your Mr. Wray there in his shirt sleeves, digging holes in the ground?"

"Yes; he always does the transplanting," answered Gertie. "Let's go along up the path, and I will speak to him."

The young man looked up from his work as they approached, and greeted them with a pleasant "good-morning, ladies." He was a young Scotchman, with a shrewd, kindly face, who made a science of his business, and loved his flowers as if they were friends. Gertie's enthusiasm for his greenhouse pets had made him better acquainted with her than with his customers generally.

"May I take my cousin all around the greenhouse, Mr. Wray?" asked Gertie. "I want to show her your beautiful plants, and I want to get two or three roots of pansies, to blossom till summer in my room. I can't have any place for a garden, you know, but they will live in the window, wont they, if I put them in great boxes of earth?"

"O yes," replied the gardener, "only you must not give them too much heat, nor pet them too much. I will give you a plenty of rich soil around the roots. I have them here in a hotbed, and you can take your choice."

"O! O!" exclaimed Nan and Gertie, both in delight, as he led them to the corner where the pansies were, and lifted the glass frame from over them. They were in full bloom, great beautiful things looking right up in the face of the sun, of every shade and tint, from the deepest purple-black, through all the varieties of bronze and golden, royal purple, blue and lavender, down to pearly-white.

"Only ten cents apiece," said Gertie, congratulating herself that she had half a dollar in her purse. "I can take five. Come, Nan, help me choose them."

They were quickly chosen and set aside, a black one, a golden one, a brilliant purple with a yellow eye, a white one, and one of rosy lilac.

"You have the choicest varieties there," said Mr. Wray. "I will bring them to your house this afternoon. They are too heavy for you to carry now."

"O, and then perhaps you will show me how to set them out!" exclaimed Gertie, well pleased, while Nan arched her eyebrows and scanned the young gardener with a quizzical air, as if to see and ridicule any advantage he might take of Gertie's familiarity.

He colored very slightly, not at Gertie's words, but at Nan's look, and turning aside opened the greenhouse door for them to enter.

Nan's mood changed when she entered there, among the rows upon rows of flourishing plants, most of them in bloom, fragrant and beautiful. The great pure calla lilies, the spicy carnations, the brilliant varieties of geraniums, the primroses, and fuchsias, and lovely monthly roses—they could not fail to reach a warm corner in her heart, which was really a true womanly one, when fashion was not playing pranks with it.

"How much better it is, after all," she thought to herself, "to have one's business among plants and flowers, and to be constantly with them, than to live in barracks, and go on dress parade, like that flirting Captain Darrell, or to be always thinking of bales of cotton and dry goods, like Uncle Ben and Mr. Dimock, or to be forever changing and fickle, like Harry Meade."

And then with a sigh she thought of Phil Stevens. He was always manly and ambitious; he was an engineer, and trained his thoughts to grapple with rocks, and mountain ranges, and river beds. There was something in that that seemed splendid to Nan, but she did not dare to think long about it, he was so far away. He might be dead now, for no one heard from him, at all. There was terrible suspense and pain in thinking of Phil Stevens now.

"What beautiful new flowers these are!" she exclaimed, suddenly turning her thoughts to the broad shelf of plants before her.

"They look like bushes of pink and rose-colored pansies," said Gertie. "See, they have just the pansy marking, just that bright air, as if they were faces looking at you. But the green leaf is like a geranium. Is it a geranium, Mr. Wray?"

"They are *pelargoniums*," he replied, "of the geranium family, but differing from the plants usually called by that name. I have twelve varieties here; you see how they differ in size and color."

"I really think I must have one," said Nan. "I don't care much for flowers usually, but these take my fancy. Now, here is one I like very much; the flower is not so very large, but it is a beauty!"

"That is the Duchess of Devon," said the gardener; "it is fragrant, too, and the only sweet-scented pelargonium that we have."

And he pinched off a leaf for Gertie, that she might get the perfume.

"Just think how geraniums blossom," said Nan; "pretty nearly all the year round. And I suppose these do the same. I should like this Duchess of Devon, Mr. Wray."

"I must not mislead you," he said, smiling; "they are related to the geraniums, but they do not bloom so freely. This plant will go on blooming now for a season, till June, maybe, but then the blossoms will stop altogether, and it will simply rest and grow till the year comes round to another spring."

"I don't know as I mind that," said Nan, pleasantly. "It is a way we all have. No one can be blooming and beautiful the whole time, year in and year out. I sympathize with the Duchess of Devon. I will take it, Mr. Wray."

"Shall I bring it to you with the pansies?"

"O no. I want to take it myself; the pot is not very large. I can carry it easily, you see, and now it is mine, I want it at once."

And she took her unwonted burden into her hands.

"I almost wish I could carry my pansies, too," said Gertie, impulsively. "But you'll bring them up soon, wont you, Mr. Wray, and show me how to set them out?"

"Yes, indeed, I will," he answered in a prompt friendly manner, that made Nan think again with some amusement, how good friends her cousin and the young Scotch gardener seemed to be.

"Who would have thought of my going out and buying a pelargonium this morning?" laughed Nan, gayly, as they walked along the street homeward. "I never knew there was such a plant in existence before. But it is lovely, and I mean to get a great deal of good from it. It will be a relief from constant dress-making, and party-going, and husband-hunting, and bitter vanities, to watch these little buds come and grow into blossoms. I mean to give myself a vacation from worldliness while the pelargonium blossoms, and I realize more now, Gertie, how you feel about your daffodils. I shouldn't wonder if flowers were little angels!"

"WHAT'S all this? What's all this?" exclaimed Mr. Benjamin Van Lew, coming noisily into the library, where Nan stood. "Who rang the door-bell and came in a few minutes ago?"

"It was the gardener from the greenhouse, uncle," said Nan; "he brought some flower-roots for Gertie, and I believe he is in the dining-room now setting them out for her in those big green boxes she is always carrying from one sunny window to another. I have bought a plant, too, Uncle Ben. Look at it, and see how pretty it is."

"Flowers wont clothe you, flowers wont feed you," grumbled Mr. Van Lew, coming nearer. "What is it, a dandelion?"

"A Duchess of Devon pelargonium, uncle," said Nan, laughing. "You don't appreciate it; see how full of blossoms it is."

"Flowers fade, they all fade," said her uncle, testily; "it don't blossom forever, does it?"

"O no; it has only its little season," said Nan, lightly, "and I'm going to have mine, too, uncle. I've just made up my mind about it, and I've set myself a boundary. As long as this plant keeps on blossoming I'm going to be just as free and happy as I can, and not think anything about settlements, or husbands, or any such things. If any one proposes to me in the time, I'll reject him without a moment's hesitation, no matter who he is! There, that's my declaration of independence, uncle; and you'll let me have my way about it, wont you?" she added, coaxingly.

"It is a singular proposition—a most singular proposition," said her uncle, looking rather nonplussed. "Pray how long will the thing blossom, Miss Nan?"

"Only till June or thereabouts," said Nan, with a little pathetic quaver in her voice; "it is not a long respite, uncle. Please not talk to me about marriage any more till then."

Her uncle's face suddenly cleared of its perplexity.

"I will agree to this extraordinary proposal, Nan, if you on your part will agree to mine, that is, if you will promise to accept the first offer of marriage made to you after the last bud has blossomed."

And he thought to himself that he would take good care from whom that offer should come. Mr. Dimock should not want for a friendly hint at the right moment.

Nan hesitated, but a sort of desperation



urged her to make the promise. It could not be worse than now, she thought, and in this time between, this golden interval of freedom, some great good fortune might happen to her, something might come in to save her.

"Very well, Uncle Ben," she said, at length, dreamily, as if her heart was looking into the future, "I will take my few months, and have all the peace I can in them; then, when the last blossom comes on the pelargonium, I will take your advice. I will do as you wish." But in her heart she hoped that when the time came it would find him gentler.

So the quaint compact was made, and Nan tried to dismiss care and to take heart of hope. It seemed such a long time before summer, before the pelargonium would cease blooming. If Phil Stevens were alive, they would certainly hear from him in that time, she thought.

Meanwhile, the young Scotch gardener in the dining-room was settling out the pansies for Gertie, and giving her curious bits of information about the flowers he had seen in other countries.

"He'll be sending in a bill for lessons in botany, confound him!" muttered Uncle Ben, as he passed the open door.

But Mr. Wray did not stay long after his work was done; and Gertie was soon calling Nan to see how beautiful and glowing her pansies were in their new bed in the sunny window.

A week later Nan and Gertie were arranging themselves for the last "sociable" of the season. There had been a set of these sociables, lasting through the entire winter, held first at one house and then another, and this final one, with her uncle's consent, Nan had reserved for herself to give. So, as it was to be in the house, Gertie was to join in it too, though her time for parties had not regularly come.

Nan was sitting in a lovely *fauteuil* before the mirror, having her hair dressed, when Gertie came softly in with two elegant bouquets, and laid one in her cousin's hands.

"O, how exquisite!" exclaimed Nan. "But, Gertie, who sent them? If it was Captain Darrell or Mr. Dimock, I won't carry one of the flowers. I'm free to do as I please about such things now. Tell me quick, Gertie, before I set my heart on these rosebuds."

"O, you needn't refuse them," said Gertie, good-naturedly. "Mr. Wray sent them. I went down to the greenhouse to get some

geranium leaves and smilax, and when he found it was for a party, he cut me these two beautiful bouquets. Wasn't he kind?"

"Very kind," said Nan, dryly; "now make haste, and get your hair curled, Gertie. It is almost time for our guests to come. I heard the bell ring just now."

A pleasant voice came through the chamber door, which stood ajar, and startled them. A bright young face, with golden hair wreathed with forget-me-nots, peeped in.

"Why, Rose Stevens!" exclaimed Nan. "Where did you come from?"

"O, I came early," laughed Rose, "so as to have papa's escort. I thought you wouldn't mind letting me in now. Maud is at home with a headache; she can't come."

"Have you heard anything from your brother yet, Miss Rose?" asked Gertie, who was leaving the room, but stopped in the kindness of her heart to put this question, because she knew Nan must want to know, and yet might shrink from asking.

"Not a word," said Rose, shaking her head sadly. "Isn't it strange? In November he was in Sacramento, and wrote so cheerfully about his prospects, and how he expected an appointment in the new railroad survey among the mountains. And not a word have we heard since."

Nan's hand shook among her flowers, but she made no remark. How could she show all her feelings, even to Rose, since there had been no real engagement between her and Phil? nothing more than what some people might call a flirtation, only to the actors it had been too sweet, too intense for that. And then at the last, with such a look in his eyes of love suppressed, Phil had come for a sudden good-by, and said he must go out into the world and win a fortune, and prove himself a man, before he could ask for the gift he most desired on earth. But people did not know that; they did not know any reason why Nan's heart should beat faster at the mere mention of his name.

The sociable was a success that night, the gayest and best of the season, everybody said, and Nan did the honors like a little queen. There was an airy grace and freedom about her that distinguished her more than usual, and the guests felt it.

"Confound it all!" thought Captain Darrell, stroking his mustache. "I don't feel half so sure of her liking me, as I did at Mrs. Roberts's party. I wonder if Dimock is coming in ahead of me, after all!"

He did not know the finer influences at work in Nan's mind.

"I don't like any of the other girls half as well," he muttered, looking disconsolately up and down the long parlors. "Perhaps the pretty Nan doubts me, and wants more devotion. I can be devoted enough, if that's it."

And away he went to hover around her in all the intervals of the dances. There was an airy coldness in her manner that plucked him and lured him on. From time to time he left her, but only to return again.

"A flower for your thoughts, Captain Darrell!" said pretty Rose Stevens, lightly, as she came upon him at one time, half hid by a curtain, staring gloomily out of the window.

His ever-ready gallantry made him turn with a smile.

"Would you really give me a forget-me-not for my poor thoughts?" he said. "It is such a genuine faithful little flower, you know."

"I never pay counterfeits," she replied, with a blush and a laugh.

"Well, give me the flower first. Now I will tell you. I was thinking of the hollowness of the world, Miss Rose."

"O, there is no such thing," she answered, gayly, willfully misunderstanding him. "The world is full of fire in the centre, you know. Just like a great many people, who are warmer at the heart than we give them credit for."

"I'll give it up," he said, laughing, "if you will dance this redowa with me, and not be cold-hearted." And, as they whirled gayly away together, he thought to himself, "Maybe Miss Nan Van Lew will be more gracious when she sees that I can get along without her."

But Nan who was watching them only smiled behind her fan. She understood it all perfectly, and was delighted. She exchanged whispers with Gertie, who had just joined her, breathless from the dance, and they both laughed. But the laugh ceased, and a flush mounted to Nan's brow, as Mr. Dimock, who had just arrived at that late hour, approached her radiantly, and with his compliments begged her acceptance of the singular but elegant bouquet he held in his hand.

It was composed entirely of pelargonium blossoms of every shade, varying from the deepest purple and crimson, through all the rosy and pink tints, to white, and to tiny vivid scarlet clusters.

Nan felt provoked; she was sure her uncle had betrayed her, but she answered, sweetly:

"What a very unusual choice, Mr. Dimock! Pray, give them to Gertie, here, she will appreciate them so much better than I."

"O no, I am sure they suit you best," insisted Mr. Dimock, blandly; "it is an unusual bouquet, I admit, but it means a great deal, Miss Van Lew, it means a great deal."

"I don't doubt it," said Nan, throwing it carelessly on a chair beside her; and seeing, to her great relief, that Harry Meade was coming to claim her as a partner, she rose gayly, and floated off in the graceful dance. Mr. Dimock, nowise disconcerted, remained talking with Gertie, who was both amused and embarrassed.

So the evening passed away. At a later hour, as the guests were departing, Nan overheard a gentleman asking Mr. Dimock if anything had been heard of young Stevens yet, and Mr. Dimock said no, there was no news at all of that shiftless young man, and probably never would be.

Nan set her lips firmly, and looked at the pelargonium bouquet with a frown.

### CHAPTER III.

THE spring passed gently and softly by, with its sweet sunshine and its fragrant air, its budding trees and its early flowers. Gertie's pauses flourished and bloomed in splendor, and her windows became yet more full of plants, for every few days there was something new added from the young Scotchman's greenhouse, and he had given her, besides, some roots and cuttings that would do well even in the narrow shaded garden plot. So Gertie had grown to be quite a gardener, and went singing about among her books and flowers in perfect content. But Nan was not contented, and did not go about singing; she waited and watched, and felt as if one by one the walls of defence were crumbling down.

One morning she came down stairs earlier than usual, and breakfast not being ready, thought she would go into the library and water her pelargonium, and put it in the sunniest spot. Her Uncle Ben was there before her; she saw him as she opened the door, bending over the plant, counting its buds and blossoms.

"Are you in such haste?" she asked, with a grain of bitterness.

"Aha, niece!" he exclaimed, rubbing his

hands merrily. "Summer is at hand, you know, and I wanted to see how soon we might expect a wedding in the family."

Nan turned her glance upon the pelargonium; there was one cluster left on which all but two of the buds had blossomed, rich, rosy, pink and beautiful.

"At least there are two buds to be waited for," she said, laughing recklessly, and feeling as if it really did not matter much now what became of her, since Phil Stevens was dead or had forgotten her.

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed Gertie, coming gayly into the room. "Flowers? O Nan, you must come and look at my morning-glories!"

"Flowers, nothing but flowers!" said Uncle Ben, testily. "You ought to hire out to work in folks' gardens, Gertrude; your hands are actually getting brown already. However, I don't know as it makes any difference how they look for a year or two to come."

Gertie blushed, and did not tell him, as she might have done, that she expected to go to the greenhouse that very afternoon, to take lessons in the mysteries of potting plants and setting out cuttings in sand. Nan was too much engaged with her own troubles to notice what Gertie did, so the light-hearted girl pursued her flower studies unmolested, with the wise young Scotchman for a teacher.

Two days after this the last bud on the pelargonium opened and displayed its crimson leaves to the sun. The probation was at an end.

"O little flower, if you had only known, you would have been good and waited a week longer, wouldn't you?" whispered Gertie, bending over it, and feeling very sorry for her poor pretty Cousin Nan.

True to the moment, that very morning Mr. Van Lew gave Nan a letter containing Mr. Dimock's proposal of marriage in due form.

"I've given my consent at once," he said, triumphantly, "and you must have your 'yes' all ready when he comes for it this evening, Nan. He is going to do the handsome thing by you, too, you silly girl; splendid settlements and all that. You'll live like a queen. Now do take your good fortune graciously, and be thankful."

Poor Nan! there was little thankfulness in her heart as she hurried away to her own room, and, throwing herself down upon the sofa, wept bitterly.

"I'd run away," advised Gertie, defiantly.

"I'd beg my bread from door to door, before I'd marry him!"

"O Gertie!" sobbed Nan. "If I only knew Phil was alive and that he cared for me, I could resist to the last, even if Uncle Ben killed me. But if Phil is lost to me, I don't care what happens to me in the miserable future. I might as well marry Mr. Dimock, I suppose, as to be wretched any other way, and wretched I should be in any other case. At least, he would not treat me so very badly, and maybe I could make things better for you, Gertie, so that by-and-by, when your time to love comes, you wouldn't be forced to marry any one you hated."

Gertie blushed a vivid scarlet, but Nan, with her face buried in the pillows, did not notice it.

"I do wish there was something I could do for you," said Gertie, after a little pause.

Nan roused herself.

"There is one thing you might do, though it is really useless, I know. Suppose you take back that book and pattern I borrowed of Rose Stevens, and ask to see her herself, and then before you come away manage to find out if they have heard anything from Phil. There might have been some news this very morning—a letter, a telegram. And it would be so dreadful to have gone too far before I found it out."

"I'll go this minute," said Gertie, promptly; and hurrying on her hat and cape she went.

It was all to no purpose; Nan felt that, even before she saw the sober disappointed face back in her door, with no news to tell.

"Rose says her father despairs of ever hearing from him again, and now, that the last steamer has arrived without any news, they all feel that it is hopeless."

Nan turned her face wearily to the wall.

"Go away now, Gertie," she said. "I shall not go down to dinner. Tell Uncle Ben I am not well, but hope to be better by evening. If anything happens come and tell me; but there won't anything happen!"

And so Gertie went down, and left her alone in her unhappiness.

The morning passed into afternoon, and the hours of the afternoon were wearing away, and still Nan staid up in her room alone with her bitter thoughts.

Suddenly, like a burst of sunshine, the door opened, and in came Gertie, her face radiant, bringing carefully in her hands the heavy flower-pot with the pelargonium.

"What is it?" exclaimed Nan, starting up.

"O Nan," cried Gertie, joyfully, "there is another cluster of buds coming out on the pelargonium! such little tiny baby things we none of us ever noticed them. Just see. O, only think of it, it will be at least two weeks before they are grown up and blossomed. You know I had to go down to the greenhouse this afternoon, and while I was talking with Mr. Wray, he asked me why I looked so sad. For I was thinking about you and Phil all the time. Well, I didn't tell him exactly what the trouble was, but gave him to understand there was a great wager depending on the pelargonium blossoms, and you and I were afraid we had lost it, for we had watched the flowers every day, and the last one bloomed this morning. He smiled, and said maybe it wasn't so bad, after all, for that very often when one thought the plant had entirely done blooming, there would come one or two late clusters more, after all. And so—and so—well, you see, he had some roots to bring up here for me, and when we reached here I took him into the library, and he looked so knowingly down in among the leaves, and sure enough, there he found these little tiny buds coming! Only two or three, but they give you time, Nan; as much as a fortnight more, at least. Aren't you glad? and isn't it a blessed pelargonium?"

"I accept it as a good omen!" said Nan, eagerly examining the plant. "Wouldn't it be wonderful, Gertie, if a way should be provided for me out of all this trouble, even yet?"

"Just like a splendid poem," assented Gertie. "And now, what are you going to do with Mr. Dimock's offer?"

"Refuse it, point blank!" said Nan, springing up, and going to the writing desk. "Uncle Ben and he are finely caught now. I had permission to refuse every proposal of marriage until the pelargonium ceased to bloom!"

"O, how exciting it is!" exclaimed Gertie, whose young heart was ready to be thrilled by the slightest touch of romance.

Uncle Ben's rage and Mr. Dimock's disappointment, when they learned how fate had outwitted them, were inexpressible. It was only when Mr. Dimock asked if there was anything in the terms of the curious compact to make a second offer impossible, that Uncle Ben's good humor returned.

"That's it, that's it!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "Nothing was said about that. She can't get away from a second offer, and

we'll watch well for the moment to make it, Dimock, eh, old fellow!"

All this Gertie heard and faithfully reported to Nan, who laughed at first, and then grew serious as she thought that perhaps, after all, she was only prolonging the struggle, and the same inevitable defeat would overtake her at last, though she escaped it now.

And so indeed it seemed as the weeks wore away. Her uncle grew triumphant again, as the tiny buds on the pelargonium raised themselves, and began to show the hidden pink of their petals. Gertie was in despair, and Mr. Wray had no more hopes to offer. As for Nan she seemed gloomily indifferent; she felt as if the last throw had been made and there was nothing more to risk or lose.

It was at this time that Rose Stevens called with an important face to announce her engagement to Captain Darrell. The gallant captain, discomfited by Nan's rebuffs, and flattered by Rose's friendship, had begun what he thought a flirtation, but which had ended in his falling desperately in love with the pretty, good-natured Rose who had liked him from the first. A more radiantly happy pair of lovers could nowhere be found.

Nan listened to the story with sincere pleasure, mingled with a little amusement, and gave her congratulations most affectionately. She was glad to see Phil's sister happy even if she could not be happy herself.

"And now," said Rose, wistfully, "I wish you were as happy as I, dear Nan!"

Nan was touched by this; the unwonted affection from Rose moved her; she had no weapons of pride or reserve against Phil's sister, and before she knew it she had half confessed how unhappy she was, and how her uncle's wishes distressed her. Rose could not understand it at first, so little by little the whole story of the pelargonium came out, and then the fact that the last blossom would surely be out some time to-morrow.

"And I may as well give up fighting against it," said Nan. "After all, there is no one on earth now that loves me excepting this poor Mr. Dimock. Perhaps it will be as well so as anyway."

Phil's name was not mentioned by either of the girls, but Rose felt sure in her inmost heart that if he had only lived to come back to them, Nan would not now be in this strait. But there was nothing she could say, and so at last she kissed Nan sadly and went away.

The next day came. Uncle Ben said at

breakfast, with a rather malicious smile, that that bothersome flower would certainly be quite open by noon, and he should bring Mr. Dimock home to dinner, so Nan had better put on her prettiest dress, and be agreeable. Then he went off whistling, to attend to some business down town.

Nan and Gertie went with a sort of tragic solemnity into the library to watch the unfolding of the pretty pluk flower. It was more than half open—standing there in the sunshine it would take but a few minutes to become a perfect blossom.

Suddenly Gertie left the room, and Nan glancing from the window, and seeing Mr. Wray coming up the steps with his hands full of flowers, smiled sadly, and thought how easily her cousin had deserted her.

It was while Gertie was still standing at the door talking with Mr. Wray, that the Stevens' carriage drew up by the pavement, and Rose's sweet face looked out of the window.

"Has the pelargonium bud blossomed yet, Gertie?" she asked, as Gertie ran down to hear what she had to say.

"No, but it will in less than five minutes!" said Gertie, and then added, "Isn't it too bad! Poor Nan sits watching it in the library?"

"Just in time then! Hurrah!" shouted a glad manly voice from inside the carriage, and then the door opened, and out leaped upon the pavement a tall, sunburned, handsome young fellow, who, without stopping for another word, dashed up the steps, into the house, and into the library where Nan sat tremulously watching her flower.

"O, Nan, Nan, my little darling!" he exclaimed, catching her in his arms, "it isn't all in vain that I have worked and toiled for you, and come back to you at last, is it, Nan?"

"Phil, Phil, O my love, I thought you were dead!" said poor Nan, really believing for the first moment that she was dreaming, and

then sinking in perfect happiness upon his breast. The last rosy petal of the pelargonium flower unfurled in the sunshine and it was a perfect blossom.

Outside Gertie was clapping her hands in joy, while Rose looked on smiling from the carriage.

"He came last night, at midnight, in the steamer," said Rose, beginning to explain at last. "And he has been away off down in Mexico where the wars and revolutions were going on all the time. That's why we got no letters; he wrote them often enough, but the mails were continually being destroyed. Wasn't it dreadful! But he got into some first-rate speculation there, and has made heaps of money, so it is all right now. O Gertie, Gertie, how splendid it is!"

"And now he will make her the first offer!" exclaimed Gertie, in an ecstasy, "and the dear blessed little pelargonium has been the saving of her, after all!"

Mr. Wray was looking on in smiling amazement, and as Rose at last drove merrily away, Gertie took him into her confidence and told him the whole story. Gertie and Mr. Wray were by this time on most friendly terms, as you may judge from the fact that he kissed her there in the hall, and whispered:

"It's almost as sweet a romance as ours, isn't it, pet? And what wonder-workers the dear flowers are?"

Uncle Ben found himself completely checkmated when he came home to dinner, bringing Mr. Dimock with him, but the latter gentleman managed to console himself with the reflection that a wife so unloving would never have made him happy.

So at last all went well, and the marriage bells were rung for Phil and Nan.

The next blow to Mr. Benjamin Van Lew was Gertie's engagement to Mr. Wray, but his words availed no more than the idle wind, she married the man of her choice and never repented it.



## NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND.

BY ESTHER SERLE KENNETH.

### CHAPTER I.

DISTANCE does not lend enchantment to Elmwood. On the contrary, it is not until you step in the very dooryard, under its trees, that you discover its charms. It is a highly comfortable, quaint, old-fashioned place, with a latticed porch, heavily laden with bitter-sweet, an old grape-vine clambering over one end, foot-paves running from the low gate across the grassy yard to the open door, where a fine dog often lies twitching his ears at the flies.

Within, the dark wainscotted rooms are comfortable and cool on the hottest days. On the window-sills there are pots of red roses. Great portraits hang about. The apartments have plenty of ancient mahogany furniture, with a good share of stuffed rocking-chairs.

The outer south door, under the grape-vine, opens into a square hall where the rack for guns and fishing tackle is usually filled during the sporting season. When the pines murmur in the balmy wind, and the hay is down, at midsummer, Elmwood is much visited by the Cheritons' city friends.

Several years ago Mrs. Cheriton and her only daughter sat at work, one day, in one of the white, low-studded chambers.

The elder lady was a well-preserved, handsome, black-haired woman, and her daughter was like her in many respects. Olive Cheriton had the same regular features, the same polished ivory forehead, the same eyes and hair. Both women had a look of social distinction which had accrued from several years' life in the fashionable world and a twelvemonth of foreign travel. Though born and bred at Elmwood, Mrs. Cheriton, marrying early, had gone to New York, where the natural emulation of her disposition, tact and good conversational powers enabled her to soon take rank among highly cultivated and wealthy people. Though, after the birth of her children and death of her husband, she became reduced in means, and was forced to retire from the fashionable city to her old home, she still maintained the social associations she so highly valued, and made the tour of Europe in company with some of her metro-

politan acquaintances, while Elmwood became a regular summer resort for the city friends of the family.

Under these circumstances, it was, perhaps, remarkable that so fine a woman as Olive Cheriton was engaged to so ordinary a man as Tom Dyle, only son of Commodore Dyle of New York. But Miss Cheriton did not covet a talented husband, while possession of a city residence had become, she declared, "a necessity of her nature." So Tom Dyle, with his brag, brutal temper, and brilliant expectations, had no difficulty in obtaining the promise of handsome Olive Cheriton's hand. The young lady seemed satisfied, and her friends, one and all, were delighted with the match.

Olive was at work on her own wedding garments, for the Cheritons were obliged to observe economy in their domestic duties. A table was strewn with linen, cambric and laces, and Mrs. Cheriton had her lap full of snowy embroidery.

"What do you want on this under-waist, Olive? lace or an embroidered edge?" asked Mrs. Cheriton.

"Trim it with the embroidered edge Vieve Harwich sent out by Alf. It was very good of Vieve to send me such lovely trimmings. Alf is a little soft of Vieve, I think," said Olive, stitching away steadily.

"The Harwichs are a good family," said Mrs. Cheriton, thoughtfully.

"Carriage coming!" cried a harsh voice, and a tame old African parrot walked sedately into the room.

"Go back to your perch, Redcap," commanded Mrs. Cheriton, shaking her finger at the bird, who paused on the door-mat and surveyed her attentively, with his head on one side.

"There *is*, mother. Redcap has told the truth for once," said Olive, listening to the approaching sound of wheels.

The parrot climbed to the window-sill.

"Carriage coming!" he cried, again, as a buggy rolled up to the gate.

Mrs. Cheriton, huddling her lap of embroideries, ran to the window and peeped through the shutters.

"Olive, come here! It is—it certainly is the commodore!"

Olive hurried to her mother's side.

"Yes, it's Tom's father. How do I look, mother?"

"A little too flushed. You had better bathe your face before you go down. Don't change your dress; a cashmere dressing-gown is what a lady should wear in the morning. I hope Bridget will show him into the south parlor. I will go down and meet him. Be ready when I send for you. And now pray do be gracious, Olive—for you know all Tom's expectations depend on pleasing his father."

"Of course," replied the young lady, lavishly dashing cold water upon her crimson cheeks, at the washstand, while her mother hastily arranged her headdress and went down.

A square, florid-faced, white-headed man was just taking his seat in the pleasant south parlor as Mrs. Cheriton tripped down the stairs. In an instant she had saluted the commodore with the most profuse cordiality.

"So these birds of ours think of mating?" said the old gentleman, when the subject of conversation became Tom and Olive. "I have never seen Miss Cheriton, but if she resembles her mother, I shall be proud of so beautiful daughter-in-law."

"My daughter is said to resemble me," said Mrs. Cheriton, genuinely pleased with the old sailor's hearty manner. "I will send for her, and let you judge for yourself."

"Pray do."

The next moment Olive entered the room. Unlike most dark women, she looked well in daylight. The commodore advanced and raised the slender, jewelled hand to his lips.

"I am certainly delighted by my son's choice, Mrs. Cheriton," he said.

Then there was nothing to do but to be sociable and have dinner, to the fresh viands of which the commodore did ample justice.

"I have but half done my errand yet," he said, eating cherries. "Tom commissioned me to bring Miss Olive to Beach Bay, a little place at which I have spent part of the summer, for a season or two. If the young lady consents to go, he will meet her there. The society is good; she will meet the Harwichs, also. I should be very happy to take her down to-morrow in my carriage, if she pleases. The distance is but about twelve miles."

As the commodore evidently wished it, Olive concluded to go. The next morning, seated beside her expectant father-in-law, she rolled away seaward, to the great satisfaction of her mother, who went on with her hemming, tucking and basting of the wedding paraphernalia, unassisted and uncomplaining.

## CHAPTER II.

THREE days after Olive Cheriton's arrival at Beach Bay, her brother Alf, hearing that the Misses Harwich were at the Spring House, came down. He was a gay, sunny-haired fellow, as unlike his sister as possible. Vieve Harwich was a generous and noble girl, but her younger sister Lora was the most artful little flirt in Christendom.

This young lady was pacing the porches, one morning, when Tom Dyle's stanhope appeared on the beach. Tom was giving Lady Bess a constitutional.

If there was one direction more than another in which Lora Harwich's inordinate ambition aired itself, it was in taking possession of other girls' lovers. No sooner did she catch sight of Tom Dyle whirling across the beach in his new carriage, than out fluttered her snowy handkerchief.

And because the girl looked ravishingly pretty in her morning dress of rose-colored cambric, Tom turned Lady Bess's head towards the house. He drew rein, looking at her attentively, as she stood smiling at him.

"What do you want, Lora?"

"What do I want? Why, a ride in your new stanhope, of course; what else *could* I want?" asked Lora.

Away she flew for her hat and shawl.

She was seating herself elaborately beside Tom, when Miss Cheriton and her sister Vieve came out upon the porch.

Bowing jauntily, and pulling in her pink skirt from the wheel, Lora cried:

"Good-by! we are going to the spring. Now, Tom!"

Olive Cheriton nodded with an indifference that was entirely assumed, and this was not the first time that the little coquette's high-handed audacity had annoyed her. But of late, since Olive's engagement with Tom Dyle had become public, Lora had plied her skill in other directions. She was *petite*, and a well known flirt; Olive scorned to acknowledge such a rival—yet Lora's efforts always stung, since they were made publicly and

provoked comment. She knew that Lora Harwich was engaged, and did not want Tom Dyle, yet it was not pleasant to have people remarking that Tom wanted Lora. So as the piquant face and pink dress whirled across the lovely beach towards the spring, where people from the island hotel—many of them New Yorkers of her set—were sauntering and gossiping, Miss Cheriton's dark brows contracted.

"Good-morning, ladies!"

She turned.

Bland, suave old Commodore Dyle stood, hat in hand. Though a little gouty, the commodore always took his morning stroll most blithely.

"A day that dawns so auspiciously for me must be a pleasant one," he said, bowing again.

"But I am afraid that it is going to be too hot for much enjoyment to anybody," said Vieve Harwich.

"How cool the island looks off there in the sea," said Olive, making an idle remark to conceal her mood.

"It would be a fine day for visiting Shale's Island," said Vieve.

"Capital!" said the commodore, pounding the porch with his cane. "Good people," turning to a group who sauntered out, "who goes to Shale's Island to-day?"

He pointed across the water as he spoke to a spot like an emerald in the blue water. It was a famous retreat for pleasure-parties; a fine vineyard was upon it; people were entertained by the owner, Jacob Shall. People at Beach Bay usually visited it once or twice during the season, but as yet our sojourners had not made the excursion.

But a party was made up that morning. In an hour after breakfast the boat was brought down to the water's edge, and the company embarked.

But in vain Olive Cheriton watched the beach for a sign of her lover's return. Mr. Dyle and his stanhope seemed to have taken a final departure.

"Where is Tom?" shouted the commodore. "Where is my sister?" asked Vieve Harwich.

"Hush! don't you remember? They haven't come yet," said Olive, involuntarily.

But everybody was looking around.

"They have eloped," laughed thoughtless Alf Cheriton.

Olive gave him a covert look of threat.

"Has Lora taken Tom off?" asked the

commodore, in a low voice, coming to Olive's side. "Are those two up to their old tricks again?"

"They have gone to the spring," assented Olive, with a heightened color.

"The deuce take that girl!" growled the commodore. "Here, Olive, this seat; I'll take care of you. Miss Colne, Miss Harwich; now, young men!"

### CHAPTER III.

WHEN the pleasure party returned from Shall's Island, one pair of eyes, at least, discovered two figures seated cosily among the rocks, in the moonlight.

"There is the boat!" cried Tom, jumping up and running down to meet the party as they came ashore.

Miss Cheriton shut her white teeth hard, and then graciously accepted Tom Dyle's arm—for the smaller figure stood poised among the rocks, evidently waiting his return.

"Had a good time, Olive?" asked Tom, evidently in the best of humors. "Wish I had got back in time to go with you; just my cursed luck to miss Shall's Island. "Ha, there's Lora—I'll have to run back and get her off the rocks; that's an awfully steep place where she is. Wait a minute!" And before Miss Cheriton could reply, he had plunged off.

The lady's manner was that of perfect nonchalance, but her mobile red mouth settled into a hard line. The party strolled by her, going towards the house, and she waited, alone.

At last Tom came back, Lora, laughing and chatting, hanging on his arm, and Miss Cheriton saw one or two of the company look back with mischievous eyes. Her face looked dangerous in the moonlight, but even Lora's bright, sly eyes did not see that, and Miss Cheriton's voice was unruffled.

"She shall not know her triumph," was in Olive's heart.

Lora dropped Tom's arm at last, with a petulant air.

"She is not jealous, after all," she thought, "and this is getting very tiresome."

With that she ran up the steps of the Spring House to sit on the porch by her sister, and look pretty in the moonlight for the benefit of the other gentlemen.

Tom Dyle had dipped his bulky figure and round head in the surf, the next morn-



ing, and was strolling complacently upon the beach when a messenger came to say that Miss Cheriton wished to see him.

"All right, Jacky."

But he took his own time for repairing to the house, and on entering Olive's private parlor, all unaware, upon that young lady's flashing eye and stern brow.

"What the deuce—"

"Sit down, if you please," said Olive, with portentous politeness.

Tom seated himself, heavily, and stared at her.

If Miss Cheriton had been a phrenologist, or even if her observation of one Mr. Tom Dyle's idiosyncracies had been a little more sagacious, she would hardly have taken the course she followed; she had been at too much pains to captivate him to wish to lose him. But she was naturally imperious and very angry, and like most angry people acted with precipitation.

"I wish to speak with you, Mr. Dyle," she said, in a hard, cold voice, "upon the course of conduct you have lately adopted. It has been offensive to me."

"What the devil do you mean?" exclaimed Tom.

"When a lady is engaged to a gentleman, she has a right, I believe, to his attentions to the exclusion of others."

A light flashed over Tom's amazed face. His black eyes, too, began to glow.

"Mr. Dyle," continued Olive, "your attentions to Miss Lora Harwich are improper and uncalled for. It is my right, as your betrothed wife, to request that they be discontinued."

"By Heaven!" broke forth Tom Dyle, "of all things deliver me from a jealous woman! Your right, as my betrothed wife? What the deuce do you mean by taking such a tone with me, Olive?"

Miss Cheriton rose, white with passion. Though she had the right on her side, she should have known that Tom Dyle, angry, was not the man to see it.

"You will please, in speaking to me, to observe the rules of common politeness, Mr. Dyle," she said, curving her handsome lips in a sneer.

The gentleman sprang to his feet, stamping in fury. Mephistopheles, with the advantage of finer features, could hardly have expressed the violence of his nature more profoundly.

"D—n you, Olive Cheriton! this won't do. No woman, least of all, my wife, assumes

authority over me. If you don't like my ways you have only to take some other fellow who suits you better. I won't stand in your way. But I want no more of your cursed impudence."

I have intimated that Tom Dyle was a vulgar man. Miss Olive Cheriton had known it, yet even she shrank from this horrible outbreak.

"Do you wish to break your engagement with me, sir?" she asked, in a quiet voice, yet with a white cheek. She was a well-bred, dignified woman, and she had the charm of beauty and refinement. Dyle felt this through his brute passion.

"You may do as you please," he answered, flinging himself from the room with an air of bravado, yet miserably conscious that he was not ready, in spite of all, to give her up.

But Olive Cheriton did not know her advantage. She stood wavering, after the door was shut, like a person who has received a fatal wound. Deadly pale, she stood, for a moment; then crossed the room and sank into a chair. For moments she sat, fixed and pallid.

It was but a month to her wedding day. Tom Dyle had insulted, defied her.

"Yet it shall be my wedding day," she said, her face rigid with resolve.

## CHAPTER IV.

THERE was to be a ball at the Spring House that evening. The ladies, gathered in their extempore dancing hall, were busily engaged in adorning its walls with garlands of glossy oak leaves, among which wax candles were profusely placed. A few sprays of scarlet salvia, entwined with the oak, contrasted with its deep green, and of this a magnificent centre-piece was formed for the fresh white ceiling.

Lora Harwich was already trying the polished oak floor, in airy polka flights, to which she in vain coaxed Tom Dyle, who sulked at a window. Miss Cheriton, among the others, moved around quietly, apparently oblivious of his presence.

Suddenly she found her brother at her side.

"Isn't Vieve coming down to-night, sis?"

"I don't know," said Olive, absently. Absently, but not unkindly or forbiddingly, and the golden-haired young fellow lingered and confided to his sister that it would be no ball for him unless Vieve Harwich was there, an avowal which he had been longing to make

to her for months, preliminary to revealing the state of his heart to his stately mother. Olive listened gravely. In truth, she was so occupied with her own private meditations that she hardly heard what Alf was saying.

"She is so beautiful and so good," the young man ran on. "Not in the least like Lora."

"No," said Olive, with a start.

"She has such soft dark hair, and such a lovely disposition!"

"Yes."

"She has no idea how I admire her."

"No."

Olive must have been present only in the body, or she could not have helped refuting this idea, and routing her brother's delusion; it was potent to every one that Alf Cheriton considered Vieve Harwich the embodiment of all that was charming, and the young lady herself could by no earthly possibility have been unconscious of the fact.

"She sings so sweetly."

"She does."

"She dresses so beautifully."

"Yes."

"She doesn't approve of Lora's flirting."

"Who?" asked Olive, suddenly, to her brother's utter consternation.

At that moment a gentleman sauntered up, begging that Miss Cheriton would promise him the first waltz that evening, and Olive plunged into the subject of waltzes and quadrilles to the complete bewilderment and discomfort of Alf, who finally took himself off muttering.

The gentleman who stood talking with Olive was Colonel Colne of the cavalry. Tom Dyle watched them a while, then suddenly started up.

"Come, Lora," said he, "let us go down to the beach."

Lora fluttered down the long room, and disappeared with him at the door.

Olive saw them go down to the point where a row of pines flung a shadow on the rocks, and where the wherry of yesterday's excursion was pulling at its moorings. They entered, and rowed away in the gray sunshine.

In spite of this attention to herself, Miss Lora Harwich could not but discover that Mr. Tom Dyle was inwardly fuming. When she had solved the enigma, in her shrewd little head, she set herself to work to make the most of the situation.

"O dear, Tom! any one might know you

were in love, you are so glum. Tom, you used to be such a splendid fellow among us girls! and now, since you have been engaged, we don't get half a smile."

Tom pricked up his ears.

"Tom, dear, you know we always liked each other, and I am one of your oldest friends. Tell me, now, are you quite happy in your engagement? Sometimes I think you are not, and then I almost hate that proud Olive Cheriton. I could forgive her for appropriating you if I thought she made you happy, but when I see you gloomy and sad, as you have been all this morning, I get quite in a passion with her. I do, indeed, Tom."

Now this was the way for a woman to talk, Tom thought.

"Thank you, Lora," he said, pulling slowly.

Lora paused, then lifted a reproachful glance to his face:

"How like the old Tom you seemed then! I wish you weren't engaged."

"If I weren't, would you have me?" asked Tom, magnanimously.

"I don't know," murmured Miss Lora, playing with her hat ribbons.

There was another silence.

"Do you like Colonel Colne, Tom?" asked Lora, nonchalantly.

"No!" Tom burst out, "he's a dolt."

"The colonel is rather handsome, and dances finely. Cavalry officers always do, I believe. I think I have heard Olive say so."

"And I dare say she encourages him—this Colne!" sneered Tom, between his teeth. "She who accuses me of—"

"What?" asked Lora.

Tom did not reply.

"Well, I *don't* think Olive Cheriton is capable of devoting herself to any one person," reasoned Lora, with a charming little air of confidence.

"Don't you?" asked Tom.

"No," said Lora.

Tom rested on his oars, and they floated with the tide.

"I have known Olive Cheriton a long time, and I always said so," remarked Lora, pensively.

Tom Dyle was just the man to be easily beguiled by an artful woman. Never was one more easily flattered. His wandering, dissatisfied gaze was arrested by and lingered approvingly upon the pretty little figure in the end of the boat. Lora wore a black

velvet sack and an algette of scarlet feathers. She was a nice girl, certainly, always pleasant—never confounding a fellow with high and mighty airs. What a good wife she would make. These pretty, sympathetic little women were the kind to be liked, after all.

"You see, Lora," said he, commencing to pull again, "Olive pitched into me to-day because I was off riding with you instead of being at hand to attend her at the boating excursion, yesterday."

"Why! how were we to know that they were going boating? I am sure the plan was made very suddenly, and after we left!" replied Lora, with a surprised air of great innocence.

"I know it," answered Tom, gloomily. "Olive made me so devilish angry that I didn't try to explain," he continued. "She, nor no other woman, can't try driving me, and have anything to brag of in that line. I guess she understands it by this time."

At this Miss Lora was convinced that there was an open rupture between the pair. As she turned her face away to look at the prospect she smiled. Her wicked black eyes fairly danced.

"Well, don't fret, Tom," with a sweet, little air. "It will all come right, I guess. You know I am your friend, anyway."

Reciprocating this charming advance, Tom leaned forward, and imprinted a hearty kiss upon Lora's red lips.

But no sooner had he done so than a rousing shout made him look around. The commodore was paddling expertly to land in a boat of the smallest dimensions, and Tom, in his inattention to surroundings, had nearly encountered the little craft.

Bending to the oars, he turned the wherry, secretly a little discomfited.

"By Mars!" muttered the commodore, paddling away. "That's not right; that's not at all right! I shouldn't think Olive would stand it."

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## CHAPTER V.

THE Spring House ball, that evening, was pronounced a success. Everybody seemed in spirits; the ladies looked beautifully. Miss Colne wore blue crepe. Vieve Harwich was angelic in pure white. Lora wore a beautiful little bodice of scarlet silk above skirts of snowy tulle. And Olive Cheriton, with hardly an ornament but the little silver comb which confined her coronet of silky ebony hair,

certainly looked like a duchess. It was one of her oddities to wear black satin; she could certainly afford an oddity which usually rendered her the handsomest woman in an assembly.

The cornet sounded. The dancers gathered on the floor. Three consecutive times Tom Dyle danced with Lora Harwich, Olive gave Colonel Colne his waltz, then took Commodore Dyle's arm.

"You are not well—you wish to go out in the air," he said, seeing her pale face.

She nodded.

They went out of the room upon the long covered porches. The air was misty with rain. Out of sight of the lights from the windows, Olive burst into tears upon his shoulder.

"There, there, poor girl! I see it all. Pray don't give up so, my dear; you will make yourself ill. Tom behaves shamefully. Come, come (the scamp!), don't cry so, Olive, my dear; he isn't worth it."

"What have I done—what have I done that he should treat me so?" sobbed Olive, burying her eyes in her lace handkerchief.

"It's outrageous, indeed! How a son of mine should treat a woman so I cannot conceive," exclaimed the commodore. "But he's young, and don't know the worth of the sex. When a man gets past forty, you don't catch him at any such tricks. No, no."

"You are so good!" murmured Olive, with the glimmering light on her chiselled features and rich sable dress.

"Do you think so, pretty one? Well, if Jack Dyle is gray and gouty, his heart is in the right place where women are concerned, I guess. Now, my dear, wipe up your eyes and take a turn here in the fresh air, while we talk it over. When was the wedding to take place?"

"Next month."

"To think of a fine girl like you being left in the lurch so—it's incredible! Why, when I first saw you I fairly envied Tom. I was as foolish as that—old fellow that I am."

"You? Could you care for me?" murmured Olive, in a tone of melancholy amazement.

"I? why not? Do you think it is boys, only, that admire lovely women?"

"I don't know—but I should never think of crying for Tom, if you—if you—" stammered Olive, in most interesting confusion.

"Zounds, my dear! you have only to say the word, and on that wedding day you have

fixed you are Mrs. Jack Dyle," and the commodore stopped abruptly, holding Olive's hand, and looking excitedly upon her. The young lady, after a thrilling pause, put her arms around his neck.

"O," she sobbed, "you are so good! I never should have cried about Tom if I had thought you loved me."

Which was quite true. This was no marrying of the heir in prospective, but the fortune itself.

"Now you must keep our secret," with a pleading air. "Tom must not know."

And the commodore readily promised, too bewildered by his good fortune to wonder why Tom must not know; and Olive, on being conducted to the hall, flirted conspicuously all the evening with Colonel Colue. Her success rendered her more than brilliantly beautiful, and as she danced, Tom Dyle forgot his partner, and stood staring at her.

The next morning, at lunch, it was announced that Miss Cheriton had left Bay Beach.

## CHAPTER VI.

THOUGH somewhat taken aback by this movement on Olive's part, Mr. Tom Dyle did not, as yet, comprehend the intentions of his lady love.

"I tell you what, Lora," said he, "if she expects me to follow her, she is mistaken. I guess when the wedding day draws near that she'll come to terms. The bridegroom is rather a necessary part of the programme, and Olive's too devilish proud to make a failure of the thing. Rather tough for her, but it serves her right. She won't try bossing me again, I reckon."

But day after day passed, and no word or letter from Miss Cheriton. Tom was secretly uneasy, but managed to appear cool. Lora's little wicked eyes watched him maliciously.

At length the seashore party broke up and returned to their several homes.

On Tom's arrival in New York, his father announced his wedding. Tom broke into a round oath of amazement.

"Why not?" asked the commodore, who was nursing his foot on a cushion, his gout being unusually severe in the fall weather. "I like women as well as you do, Tom, and I'm going to have one of my own."

"Who?" asked Tom.

"Well, Miss Cheriton is a fine woman, and her mother is a fine woman; it's a good

family to marry into, I think," replied the commodore, cunningly.

He had been well drilled by Olive, and understood the situation. Jealousy (for his son, at least, was a younger man) made him an apt pupil. Of late he had reason to suspect that Tom was not indifferent to Miss Cheriton. The young gentleman betrayed a restlessness of manner and a nervousness at the sound of her name that was somewhat significant.

"So you are going to marry Olive's mother? Sounds!" exclaimed Tom, looking exceedingly astonished.

"When is your wedding to take place?" was the commodore's reply, as he eased the swelled limb a little.

"The thirtieth of September," replied Tom, though he winced a little at the question.

"Just the day I've set upon! Very well. And now, Tom, I'm going to take a little hearty sleep, and don't want to be talked to;" and having thus dismissed the subject and his son together, the commodore threw his handkerchief over his face and leaned back in his chair, preparatory to taking his usual lengthy after-dinner nap.

Quite confounded by this new development, Tom strolled out into the square to meditate over his somewhat involved prospects and smoke a cigar. The first person he saw was Alf Cheriton. He started, and extended his hand.

"How are you, Cheriton? How is your sister? Have you seen her lately?"

"Hardly, for a fortnight. Young ladies preparing for matrimony are usually fearfully busy and indifferent to the rest of the world. My Vieve is the only exception," blissfully. "By George! that girl spends more on beggars than she'll ever spend for dresses. It's astonishing how philanthropic she is!"

Tom attended only to the first sentences, but he managed to say:

"I suppose you are going to be married."

"Yes, at Christmas;" and Alf went on detailing his own happy prospects; to which Tom listened with ill-concealed impatience.

If Olive were still employed in the preparations for her marriage, she must confidently expect its fulfilment, and this thought—for he had of late been visited by several less pleasant ones—exhilarated him so that he quite overlooked his resentment towards her. But it was strange that no letter came. In no way could he now quite reconcile her silence. The days were flying frightfully

past while he anxiously tried to solve this problem.

Tom Dyle was one of those people who are unstable in important matters while they are decided to obstinacy in small ones. Having taken offence at Olive, and boasted that he would take no step towards a reconciliation, he would have sacrificed the best interests of both rather than yield this point. This pertinacity of purpose showed courage, he believed.

He was almost crazy, though, by the time the wedding day arrived. For a while he had been wildly uncertain as to the course he had best pursue, but at length he decided to go to Elmwood. His father was to be married—it was his duty to be present at that ceremony—and if he discovered that he, also, was expected, in the character of a bridegroom, he should come off with flying colors, having gained his point without making any concessions.

With his intentions in the most chaotic state he left the city in the early train.

At Elmwood his father's carriage stood before the door, and he was welcomed in the hall by Mrs. Cheriton. The lady was in festive array.

"You are late, Tom," she said.

"Why? Are you married?" he asked.

"I?" in momentary amazement. "No. But Olive is. There! they are going. Pray

excuse me!" and quite naturally agitated, Mrs. Cheriton hurried away.

The door of the south parlor opened. A company thronged out—foremost among them were the commodore and the bride, Olive Cheriton. She wore a pale, sheeny dress, and there were orange flowers in her bonnet.

The confused chatter of congratulations, and last words, and invitations smote Tom Dyle like a blow. He stood bewildered as Olive's silk robes rustled out. A servant rushing past him to open the door for the bridal party nearly knocked him down.

Hardly knowing what he did, he sought an egress by another way, knocking down the fishing tackle, and slamming the door as he rushed into the fields.

From a distance he saw the carriage drive away.

"Sold, by Jove!" he exclaimed.

He considered the matter twenty-four hours, then offered himself to Lora Harwich. She refused him.

In a transport of rage at the duplicity of women, poor Tom took passage for France, and was absent a year.

When he returned, the commodore proudly exhibited a younger heir, and if Tom Dyle had retired to a hermit's cell, immolating himself from the world, I should hardly have blamed him.

## N'IMPORTE.

BY BLANCHE SHAW.

"AND this phenomenon of beauty and grace will arrive to-morrow. I hope you will enjoy her visit, Esther."

"I am sure of it, Ralph, for at school Madeline was my dearest friend; and since then she has won from society the fame of being a very charming woman. I hope you will like her."

"I regret it, but I fear your hopes will not be realized. You know from the first, Esther, that I have exhibited no enthusiasm in regard to this visit, and as the event draws nearer it doesn't seem a bit more agreeable."

"Why, Ralph?"

"No, it doesn't! To tell the truth, it is a confounded bore!"

Having delivered himself of these decided sentiments, Mr. Ralph McLeod walked to the window, and plunging his hands deep into his pockets, studied the honeysuckle attentively.

Esther went on knitting rapidly for a moment or two, and then said, in a low voice:

"I am sorry that you are so prejudiced against Madeline, Ralph. Had I suspected your feelings, I would not have invited her."

"No, no," interrupted he. "I wouldn't deprive you of the pleasure of her visit for the world. I'm of no importance."

Esther's cheek blushed.

"That is unkind, Ralph. You know very well that anything disagreeable to you cannot be pleasant to me. I assure you that when I invited Madeline I thought of your pleasure as much as my own. She is a very brilliant girl; and I am sure that after you have seen her you will repent of all the unkind things you have said, and like her as well as I do."

"Kind fate forbid! I have no ambition to be a maniac, even on so superior a subject. To-morrow morning I shall start for Uncle James's. The fishing and hunting are good there; and I guess I will be able to make life endurable till the departure of the siren."

"Ralph, you don't mean it! You would not be so unkind!"

"Indeed, I do mean it; and as for the kindness of it, I think I deserve credit for my magnanimity. If I staid here I might possibly win some of your darling's smiles from

you; but going, I leave you without a rival. Of course you won't miss me."

Esther did not answer this. She was struggling so hard to keep back her tears, that she dared not trust her voice. Ralph cast a quick glance behind him, and saw the mischief that his words had done. His heart smote him; but he was a man on his dignity, and he could not step down all at once, just because a girl was a little pouty. He looked at the honeysuckles harder, and even tried to whistle, but it was a miserable attempt. The notes died on his lips in a tortured squeal, as if ashamed of themselves, as they ought to have been. He looked at Esther again. This time he saw tears glistening on her lashes. None but a brute could stand that unmoved, and Ralph wasn't quite a brute. He went to her side, and said, in a coaxing tone:

"Come, Essie, don't feel so badly. I was a wretch to say what I did; but it is confoundedly provoking to have an empty-headed flirt come in and spoil our summer for us."

"She is not empty headed, Ralph," replied Esther, loyal to her friend through all; "and she'll make our summer pleasanter."

A retort sprang to Ralph's lips, but the eyes raised to his were still shining through tears, and he swallowed it.

"Never mind, Esther, we won't discuss that now. I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. Those tears are worth more than all the Madelines in the world. Forgive me. I don't need any one to make either summer or winter bright where you are."

What woman's heart could stand such an appeal? Not Esther's. She wiped away her tears, but clung to her project.

"Never mind, Ralph. I'll forget all about it; but you must call to-morrow evening and see Madeline."

Ralph made a wry face, but he gave the desired promise, and soon Esther stood in the window, watching his tall form as it disappeared in the distance.

Ralph and Esther held that relationship, called "next neighbor," towards each other. They had been playmates from childhood; and when Esther's little feet first travelled the path to school, she clung tightly to Ralph's hand, into whose care she had been

committed by her mother, with the admonition to take good care of her little girl. And he was faithful to the charge. No big boy dared to tease, or ill-natured girl to slap or otherwise molest her while he was near. Childhood passed, and Ralph became a big college boy. The baby love grew stronger, and many were the quires of note that it consumed to tell how each was missed. At last student days were over, and Ralph returned home "a lawyer of fine promise," who was sure to make his mark in the world. The village belles smiled, and the mammas had a kind word for him; but he saw nothing but Esther. At the time our story opens he had been practising his profession five years, and won all the fame the village had to give; and the gossips had decided that it was time that Esther and he were one. Ralph smiled when the news reached him; and then he thought:

"It is time. My fame is surely spreading, and independent of that, I have enough to give Esther a home. I guess we had better be married soon."

True, he had never asked her to be his wife, but she knew he intended she should hold that position. She knew he loved her, and he was perfectly satisfied that she loved him. That was enough. He'd ask her to be married in the fall. He had intended to say this to her the morning we first met them, but Madeline's expected arrival turned everything into a different channel.

Madeline arrived in due time, and was greeted with the proper ecstasies. Esther had not overrated her beauty, and after she had left her in her room to change her travelling-dress, she smiled triumphantly over Ralph's sure defeat.

If Madeline was beautiful in her travelling-dress, she was dazzling when she reappeared in pure soft white, with no ornament but a blue ribbon wound in her auburn hair.

Esther was not plain. Her hair was soft brown, and her eyes a deep dark gray; but her complexion, though pure, was pale, which gave her a quiet home air, and made her look like a faded print beside this brilliant-hued fairy. Most girls would have feared to expose a lover to the contrast, but Esther never thought of this. She loved Madeline; she was proud of her beauty; and she wanted Ralph to acknowledge it too.

After supper the family gathered in the parlor; Madeline seated herself where the light fell in a golden shower over her, and

displayed her beauty to the best advantage. Esther watched her, and waited impatiently for Ralph. He came at last, and Esther smiled a little provoking smile at his look of unfeigned admiration when presented. But if surprised, he was not defeated. He retired to a corner, and stood by his colors nobly. After the first glance, Madeline apparently paid no attention to him, but prattled away merrily to the others. Ralph fretted under this. He addressed several remarks to her, which were answered politely but concisely, without the least encouragement for further conversation, and at last, in desperation, he surrendered himself to Mr. Merton, to discuss the last political development, till it was time for him to leave. Esther arose to go to the door with him, not quite so elated as she was a short time before. Madeline paused in the midst of an animated conversation with Esther's big brother, to give him a bewildering languid glance under her lashes, and say "good-evening."

"Well, Ralph," asked Esther, when they stood on the piazza, "is she not beautiful?"

"Very," replied he. "And she is perfectly aware of the fact."

"I am sure you'll like her."

"So you've remarked before."

"Don't be cross, Ralph."

"Don't be foolish, Esther."

A silence of a few minutes, then Esther said:

"You won't go to your uncle's to-morrow?"

Ralph mused.

"I can't say; but I—guess—not. I'll give the aurora borealis another interview." And then, as if suddenly aroused, "It is too damp for you here, Esther. I won't keep you any longer. Good-night." And kissing her cheek, he left her.

That night Madeline, resting her folded arms on the toilet table, looked into the glass and commented with herself thus:

"He is certainly very handsome, and has more style and intelligence about him than half a dozen fashionable fops melted into one. I wonder if he is eligible. I tried to get some information from that clown of a brother, but all he would say was, 'A lawyer and particular friend of Esther's.' The lawyer part is favorable; and in regard to Esther—bah! If he is her lover, let her keep him, if she can! I admire him more than any gentleman I have ever met. I shall question Esther to-morrow, and if everything is favorable, he shall be at my feet in two weeks, or Madeline

Clyde is unworthy of her laurels?" And with this most laudable resolution, she prepared for slumber.

"It is certainly delightful here in summer, Esther," said Madeline, as the two girls sat with their work under the trees the next morning. "But what do you do with yourself in the winter? I should die of *ennui*. You seem to be completely isolated; not a house in sight. Does any one else live in this country?"

Esther laughed.

"Indeed, there are plenty of people, and very agreeable ones, too, living not many hundred miles away from us. The trouble is, each house lies at the foot of a hill, and one is ignorant of the existence of his neighbor, till suddenly he sees his castle lying at his feet."

"How poetically expressed! The same Esther as of the old bright days. But to come back to mortals and mortality. As the population is so dense, I suppose the winter must be a succession of parties and tea-drinkings."

"Yes, there are a good many, but I don't care much for them. You know I always was on the quiet order, and I haven't changed any. We have a large family. Ralph is with us a great deal; and our evenings pass so pleasantly at home that it is more of a trial than a pleasure to waste any of them at parties."

"Ralph? who is he? A brother I have not seen yet?"

"No. He is the gentleman you saw last night. Mr. McLeod."

"Ah! the young man who was so devoted to your father, and spent the whole evening discussing the crops, I think it was. I didn't observe anything particularly brilliant about him."

Esther flushed.

"You certainly didn't give him much chance to display his brilliancy, Madeline; but I assure you he possesses a large amount. Our first lawyers have prophesied a successful career for him."

"Is he a lawyer?"

"Yes; and he has already won more laurels than any man of his age in the State."

"Really, Esther, you arouse both my curiosity and interest. I am eager to cultivate his acquaintance. I always feel a deep interest in such rising stars. To me there is nothing more noble than a man struggling with fortune for fame."

Esther laughed.

"I am sorry to dethrone your hero, Madeline, but Ralph isn't the man. Fortune has always been on his side. He is an only child, and his parents are wealthy. In fact, there is no need for him to spend an hour in toil"—but a shadow fell over her. Madeline uttered a pretty little scream, and Ralph stood before them. The bad humor of the past night had flown, and he was bright as the day.

"Good-morning, ladies," said he, bowing gracefully. "Miss Clyde, I beg pardon for startling you; but in return I claim some apology from you for the unpleasant information that I am ungainly enough to alarm a young lady."

Madeline smiled bewitchingly.

"Mr. McLeod does himself great injustice. The result is not always in harmony with the cause, for an angel suddenly dropped at one's feet would alarm her as much as a monster."

"Your illustration is—"

"Please Esther, mother wants you," called one of those irrepressible little sisters.

Esther obeyed the call and Ralph took her empty seat. A silence followed. The interruption had broken Ralph's chain of thought, and at a loss for something to say, he waited for his companion to speak first. But Madeline wasn't going to do anything of the kind. She intended to test his metal thoroughly this morning, and not one straw would she throw him to help him float. The silence became embarrassing. Ralph changed his hat to the other hand. From under her lashes Madeline watched him coolly and mercilessly. At last, in despair, Ralph jerked out:

"Fine day, Miss Clyde."

A little smile played around her lips, and dropping her work in her lap, she asked, solemnly:

"I wonder if one human expectation were ever realized?"

Ralph's composure was restored, and he put his hat on the ground.

"That's too deep a question for my limited information, Miss Clyde. I'll consult an authority on the subject and report the result. But why do you ask?"

Her eyes twinkled.

"Shall I tell?"

"By all means."

"Well, just before you appeared, Esther had extolled you for a paragon of talent and originality, till my expectations were wrought



up to a fearful pitch, I expected to see pearls drop from your lips; fancy the effect of your weather report."

Ralph bit his lips.

"I am unfortunate this morning. This is the second time I have shocked you; perhaps I had better anticipate the third time by leaving now." He picked up the hat. The mischief vanished from Madeline's face.

"There! now I've done it again! Said naughty things till I've offended you; and I wanted all the time to make you like me. Please forgive me this time, Mr. McLeod, and I'll try to be good in the future." The great blue eyes looked into his with a pleading gaze, and the red lip seemed to quiver. Down went the hat again, and nothing but sheer force of will kept its owner from going down, too, on his knees before her.

"Don't look so, Miss Clyde; you distress me. I was a brute to speak as I did. May I indeed dare to hope you will like me a little?"

How beautifully she played her game! It was not her policy to take the sentimental tone just yet. She had just thrown that little burst in to give a dash of color to the conversation; so that he would think of it after he left her, and at last stow it away in his memory in some little nook, where it would not be jostled by everyday things. But she wasn't ready to either receive or give any sudden outburst of friendship. She dropped her eyes, and wrapping herself up in propriety, replied:

"I don't know; perhaps, if you work for it. Suppose you begin the campaign by capturing my ball, which I see has gone on an exploring expedition in that high grass."

Ralph arose with rather a crest-fallen air, and recovered the ball.

"Thank you," as demurely as a nun. "I wonder what keeps Esther so long?"

"I really can't say; but if you are anxious about her, I will inquire."

"O no! I wouldn't trouble you for worlds; and besides, here she comes now. What has kept you so long, Esther? I had begun to fear that your exit was final."

"Have I been so very long?"

"I suppose not, according to the measurement of time; but it seemed ages to me."

Ralph tried not to look disgusted. Esther laughed.

"I'm sorry, dear, but don't feel badly, for I was talking of you. Hugh wanted to see me about a ride for this afternoon; would you like it?"

"Very much, but for the reason I have never ridden anything more dangerous than a hobby horse in my life, and I fear that I would need at least two escorts to pick me up as fast as I could fall off."

"Are you in earnest, Madeline? wouldn't you like to go?"

"I would be delighted, if you think it possible."

"Of course it is. Every one has to ride for the first time, and very few are killed by it. Ralph is a capital teacher. He will take charge of you, and I'll be responsible for the broken bones. You can go, can't you, Ralph?"

"O, certainly! that is, if Miss Clyde thinks that she can drag out a few miserable hours in my society."

"I shall be so interested in the preservation of my neck, that I shan't mind it."

"Thank you; and for fear that you may change your mind, I'll take my departure now. What time do we start, Esther?"

"Four. We will go to 'The Witches Wash Bowl,' and I want to be back by six."

"Very well; I'll be in time. *Au revoir*, Miss Clyde."

Four o'clock came, and they started for the ride. At first, Madeline was very timid, and required constant care from Ralph, much to the disgust of Hugh, who had reckoned on a continuation of the past evening. Poor boy! That was a bright dream, but it is over forever, and ere long you will bless your guiding star that it faded before it left its mark.

The weather and scenery were delightful. By the time they reached the 'Bowl,' Madeline's skill and confidence had increased astonishingly. She was in a charming mood, and before they returned, Ralph had begged the privilege of giving her riding lessons every day, till something more agreeable "turned up."

The summer rolled on, and if practice makes perfect, Madeline's prospects for being the champion *equestrienne* of the world were good. Many things had "turned up" during this time; but as soon as the spirit of disturbance was laid, the lessons were resumed. Esther, happy that Ralph was, at last, reconciled to Madeline, often remained at home, and they always staid later when she was not with them. Gossips, of course, began to talk; but Esther never listened to gossip. Madeline's visit was drawing to a close, and Esther gave her a farewell party. It was only a modest affair, not a crush; Esther.

abominated those things. Just faces enough to prevent both monotony and confusion; the object was to please, not to dazzle. Esther invited one young lady to tea. This was Lucy Rushton, her most intimate friend. Lucy was a frank noble girl, with a face as truthful and fresh as her heart. She was devoted to Esther, but she didn't like Madeline; and Madeline returned the feeling with interest; the result was a painful politeness between them; and the hour which elapsed between tea and the arrival of the guests, was a well-bred inquisition, which irritated poor Lucy's blunt nature almost to frenzy. More than once she hovered on the brink of open warfare. At last, deliverance came in the shape of the guests, and Lucy retired to a corner, vowing vengeance and a merciless surveillance of Miss Clyde's conduct in the future, and that evening in particular.

The guests had nearly all arrived, but Ralph was not among them. Madeline grew nervous. The dancing began. Still no Ralph, and Madeline reluctantly gave her hand to some one, she didn't notice who. Had she suspected how closely Lucy was watching her, she might have feigned a little interest; but she was blissfully unconscious of that maiden's attention, and her partner found her very stupid. The dance was over and she was going to a seat, when she heard her name, and Ralph stood beside her. Her air changed at once. She dropped her partner's arm, and held up her finger at him.

"O wickedness! What has kept you so long?"

"Not my will, you may be sure. Have you been dancing?"

"Yes; I couldn't help it."

"Never mind. Will you go on the piazza?" he asked.

"Yes." And without a word of apology, she went away, leaving the astonished youth to compose an essay on the manners of city girls.

It was a lovely night. The moon shimmered softly through the trees, and all the other ceteras were in good order. They walked in silence for a short time, and then Ralph said:

"Let us sit down." He drew two chairs in the shadow, and they seated themselves. The dancing had begun again in the parlor, and they were alone. Good angels, save them now, for they floated on very deep water and their craft was frail. The silence continued. Madeline waited for Ralph to

speak, but he was fighting too hard a battle to dare to trust his tongue. It was the old, old contest between conscience and self; and this was the burden of it:

Self said, "She has no claim upon me. I have never asked her to be my wife."

Conscience replied, "Coward, she has every claim. You have wooed her from childhood; and the tacit tie that binds you is the most binding, because it is the fruit of her perfect faith."

"I can't help that. I can't be responsible for her fancies."

"You have given her just cause for every hope she has."

"I thought I loved her then. I don't now."

"She loves you just the same."

"Yes, that is all very well, but I love another."

"You have no right to. Dare you wreck her happiness?"

"Then my happiness is nothing."

"Ralph!"

He started from his meditations; she had never called him Ralph before.

"What is it?" Dearest trembled on his lips, but he checked it.

"Why are you so quiet to-night? Are you ill, or sad?"

At that moment, but a few feet from them in the parlor, Lucy put her arm about Esther, and asked:

"Where is Ralph, Esther?"

Esther looked around the room.

"I don't know. He was here a few minutes ago. I guess he's with Madeline."

Lucy looked at her steadily.

"Esther you are a wonderful girl."

"And you are a naughty one, Lucy. You have tried all your life to spoil me, and if you don't stop soon, you will accomplish your aim by making me vain of my resistance."

They were standing apart from the crowd, and Esther kissed her friend's cheek. Lucy's eyes sparkled a little brighter than usual.

"Esther, you know I love you."

"Of course I do."

"Then you will forgive me if I say something that may hurt you?"

"I would rather not have the cause to forgive you. Why need you say anything to hurt me?"

"Because—because I think I ought to. Say you will forgive me?"

"Yes, I will. Now let us have the 'Raw Bones and Bloody Head.'"

Lucy hesitated, and then jerked out:

"You may think me impertinent and meddling, Esther, but I can't stand silently by, and see you imposed upon any longer. Madeline Clyde is trying her best to come between you and Ralph."

A sharp pain shot through Esther's heart. She put Lucy's arm from her, and said, coldly:

"I have no doubt but that your motives are good, Lucy, but you have rather transgressed your privileges."

"O Esther, please forgive me! You know I only meant kindness."

The tears in Lucy's eyes recalled Esther.

"Forgive me, Lucy, for speaking so unkindly, and behaving so ridiculously. I am very much obliged for your interest, but don't be anxious, my dear. I am not a bit jealous, and I am very glad that Ralph enjoys Madeline's society."

"Esther, you are so truthful yourself, that you can't suspect deceit in another. Pardon me once more; but if you would only be more watchful, you—"

"My dear Lucy, I never watched any one in my life. But I'll tell you what you can do; go and hunt them up right away, and if you overhear Ralph say one improper thing, come and tell me." And she left her to speak to a guest.

Lucy stood a moment, and then started in grim determination to fulfil Esther's playful advice. We will hurry ahead of her, and take up Ralph and Madeline where we left them.

"Are you ill, or sad?" And Madeline's voice trembled in sympathy.

Ralph shut his teeth, and tried to laugh.

"Neither, Miss Clyde; a little mooney, I guess. See how beautifully the light silvers that bush. But I beg your mercy! I believe, in the infancy of our acquaintance, you snubbed me for commenting on the beauties of nature."

Conscience had just replied to the last argument. He had faintly resolved to fight on that side, and he made this dash to get from under fire. It was in vain; she dragged him up to the guns again.

"Did I? I am sorry for it. I thought that you had forgotten all those disagreeable things. You are cruel to speak of them now."

Ralph made one more effort.

"I must do many 'cruel things,' I think."

She turned her eyes full upon him. They were moist, and, it might have been the play of a moonbeam, but he thought her lip trembled. At this moment self shrieked:

"Man, you are a brute! she loves you!"

And before conscience could utter a plea, he had drawn her to his breast and was saying:

"Madeline, my darling! my love! forgive me! I will never be cruel to you again!"

The golden head nestled closer to him, and neither saw a form steal softly back into the house. Nor did they notice the shadow that fell before them, when, a few minutes later, the form returned leading another, which stood with parted lips and clasped hands to listen.

"But Esther, darling! They say that she loves you, and that you are engaged to her."

The head bent eagerly forward to catch the answer.

"No, darling, I am not engaged to her. I once fancied that I liked her; but after I saw you, I knew that it was only a fancy. In regard to her loving me, I'm sorry if she does; but I can't help it, I won't give up my sunbeam, for all the Esthers in the world."

The form dropped its head, and, by the moonlight, one could see a shudder like a mighty convulsion pass over her; and then she turned and walked swiftly away. The other followed her; but with an imperative gesture she waved her back, and going down the steps, she was soon lost in the glimmer and shade. The other sat down on the steps, and buried her face in her hands. The lovers, forgetful of all but their happiness, built castles for the future, and through the open windows came merry music and the sound of the dancers' feet.

An hour passed, and then inquiries were made for Esther. Lucy heard them, and to defer the discovery as long as possible, stole away to Esther's room. Ralph and Madeline aroused themselves from their dream of rapture and returned to the parlor, and for a while all went merry again. Another hour passed, and still no Esther.

"It is very strange," said her mother. "Perhaps she is up stairs."

She went to her room and tried the door. It was locked. She knocked. Lucy thought it was Esther, and opened at once. Her eyes were red, and she was very pale. Mrs. Mer-ton started.

"Lucy! what is the matter? Where is Esther?"

"Esther! Hasn't she come in yet? I thought you were she."

"Come in? Where has she gone? What is the matter, child?"

"Don't ask me! don't ask me! It is dreadful! She went into the shrubbery. She

would not let me go with her; and I thought she would be better alone. 'Go after her.' I fear something has happened. O Esther!" And she burst into tears.

Alarmed and astonished, Mrs. Merton hurried down stairs and told what she could of Lucy's incoherent story, and then a search was begun.

Calls were made for Ralph, hoping that he might be able to throw some light on the mystery; but no Ralph was to be found. His guilty conscience told him the truth; and not daring to face the possible result, he left the house.

They searched the paths near the house; no trace of her. They went across the lawn to a place where the boughs interlaced so thickly that the sunlight could scarcely creep through, and there, in the cold wet grass they found her lying, still and white. With the dread their lips could not tell burning in their eyes, they lifted her, and bore her to the house. Madeline met them at the door. One look at the marble-like face, and crying, "She is dead!" she fell fainting to the floor.

But Esther was not dead. They put her on her bed, and at length consciousness returned. She opened her eyes, looked vacantly around, and then, passing her hand across her brow, said, slowly:

"Poor Esther! Isn't it dreadful?"

The white faces around her grew whiter, and each looked at the other, for the hope that none could give. The blow had spared her life, but her reason had gone.

All night her mother and Lucy watched beside her. She slept quietly, and in the morning rose and dressed herself as usual; but there was no change. The same dreary light was in her eyes, the same hopeless, crushed look on her face. She spoke to no one, and noticed nothing; and when spoken to, she would look up at the speaker with a piteous, frightened gaze, and say:

"Yes. Poor Esther! Isn't it dreadful?"

Her physician said that it would end in a violent fit of illness, and then, if her life was spared, her reason might be restored. But it did not end thus. As the summer waned her strength began to fail. They watched her with the tenderest care. She uttered no complaint, and gave no sign of suffering, but slowly and surely she grew weaker every day; and when the hazy autumn came, the time when Ralph had thought to make her his wife, they laid the tired heart to rest.

And what of Ralph and Madeline? She left for her home the morning after that terrible night, and Ralph soon followed her. He never saw Esther again, and for a while he was overwhelmed with remorse. But it was only a woman's heart that was broken. The world called that no crime; and its favors, and Madeline's smiles, soon reconciled him; and when the violets blossomed on Esther's grave, he led Madeline to the altar. The wedding was brilliant, and the bride beautiful, and friends showered congratulations on them. All looked bright. Can we, should we, wish them happiness?

## NO CHOICE LEFT.

BY MALCOLM ALSTYNE.

## I.

THE spicy fragrance of carnations came from the garden, borne to the couple in the orchard by the soft summer wind. The leaves of the apple tree, under which they were standing, shook and rustled over their heads. They could hear the gay laughter of the party assembled on the lawn, engaged in some game or other. Looking above them, they could see a sky of unclouded blue, and the river, of which they could only catch a glimpse, wound along like a silver thread a mile away. The earth beneath their feet was carpeted in dark green. The birds sang in the trees around their sweetest songs.

The two standing there in the orchard were Minnie Pierpoint and Niel Marsh. Minnie was a very pretty creature, with small figure, and a face bright and bewitching. Hers was an innocent and joyous nature. Niel Marsh was a young man of a little more than medium height. He was handsome, possessing a pair of dark eyes, a high forehead, and a brown beard and mustache. People said that he was a great flirt, and that he had never gone far enough in love affairs in his life to be seriously involved. He would make love desperately enough, but had never permitted himself to be ensnared in even an engagement, let alone that destroyer of old bachelors, matrimony.

"Shall we go to the house?" Minnie said, presently.

"As you please," Niel answered.

"Come, then."

Niel walked along by her side toward the house. The two were on quite good terms. Niel told himself that he liked Minnie as he would a sister. So, therefore, while he was cordial and friendly with her, he did not try to engage in a flirtation. Latterly, however, his manner had been approaching that of the lover.

They had almost reached the house when they encountered another couple.

"Good-morning, Miss Moreland and Mr. Durant!" Niel said; and Minnie saluted the pair also.

Miss Moreland was totally unlike Minnie, being tall and queenly. Still, she was neither cold nor distant, but very pleasant in her manners. Everybody liked Miss Moreland. Mr. Durant was a gentleman, with bright gray eyes, black whiskers, well-formed features, and a pleasantly curved mouth.

"This is a delightful morning," Miss Moreland said to Niel.

"Indeed it is," Niel replied. "The air is balmily sweet."

By some means or other the two couples became changed about, so that Niel and Miss Moreland walked together, and Minnie and Mr. Durant.

Reaching the house, they entered the parlor. Perhaps it will be best to state here that these young people, and a dozen others, were the guests of Mr. Dick Ayleshire, to whom the house, and orchard, and many adjacent fields belonged. Dick was a clever fellow, and had inherited this property from his father. He spent much

of his time in the city, but this was his summer home.

"Miss Moreland, will you favor us with some music?" Minnie said, as she opened the piano.

Miss Moreland did as she was requested. Presently a half dozen other people entered.

"Congratulate me," cried a young lady, "you ladies and gentlemen here, for I have just vanquished Mr. Clayton at croquet! I and my allies, I mean, of course."

"Are you not pretty nearly invincible, Miss Richardson?" Niel Marsh answered.

"I dare say you will vanquish Mr. Clayton in more ways than one before the summer is over."

They all laughed, Mr. Clayton with as good grace as any of them. Miss Richardson changed the subject.

"How many of you have heard that we are going to have an excursion party?" she asked. "It is to be to Beach Grove, which is three miles away, and on the river, too."

Nearly all had heard of it.

"When is it to be, do you know, Miss Richardson?" Mr. Durant asked.

"I do not," Miss Richardson returned; "in the course of a few days, I presume."

More remarks were made upon this subject, but no one knew anything more about it than Miss Richardson had told.

On the afternoon of the same day Archie Clayton was in Niel Marsh's room. These two young men were very intimate friends. They had been talking some time when Niel said, "I believe I'm in love."

"It appears to me that you ought to be positive about it," Archie laughed, in return.

"Well, then, I am in love," Niel said, "but—"

"Well?"

"You'll laugh at me, Archie, I don't doubt, when I tell you that the trouble is that I can't locate it."

Archie did laugh.

"What a term!" he said. "I guess I understand you. I suppose that a couple of young ladies divide your affections. Is that it?"

"Three of them, my dear boy!" Niel returned, dolefully enough; "all most uncommonly bewitching girls."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Archie, louder than ever. "Who ever heard of the like! Three at once!"

"I don't care for your laughing, Mr. Archie," Niel said, "but I assure you that this matter is giving me a great deal of trouble."

"Don't be alarmed, Niel, your disease is too scattering to be fatal. Pshaw, my dear fellow! I'm positive that you are not seriously affected at all. The motto of love is, 'The one woman of all the world for me.' Three, indeed! You are not in love."

"Well, it's something singular that's got hold of me, anyhow."

"And I thought, too," Archie continued, "that you were too much of a flirt to be easily caught by one woman, let alone three getting the better of you at once."

"Well," said Niel, "speaking about flirtations, that's where my trouble commenced. You see, I've decided to stop that, and to get serious. To put it plainly, I'm going to get married. My income will justify that. But looking around me, I find that three young ladies are equally high in my regard. I believe that either one of them could make me happy, if it wasn't for the other two. My dear boy, please don't think that I am assuming that I can get any one of them, for I don't know anything about that."

"O ho!" Archie replied, "I think I understand you better now. Your deliberate conclusion is that you want to fall in love and marry; there are three young ladies whom you respect and like equally. Going about this matter deliberately, you can't decide which one to love. That's it, and so don't say that you love them all. Take my advice, and let matters take their course, and fate will bring it out all right for you. Be careful that you don't ask any of them to marry you, as the result of this deliberate conclusion. Wait till you are positive that you love one girl better than all the rest of the world, then you'll be safe."

"Humph!" Niel ejaculated, "I think I will love my wife well enough. But I'm not so sure that you are right about my not being in love yet. Of course, after I'm married to a woman I will not think about any other."

"Well, who are the three girls that are giving you so much trouble, just at present?" Archie asked.

"One is Miss Pierpoint."

"I don't believe you could find anybody to suit you better."

"Another is Miss Moreland."

"Humph!" Archie returned, "if you are in love with her, you can look out for having Durant for a rival."

"I am not so sure about that," Niel said. "I thought he cared more for Miss Minnie."

"Well, well, we can only guess at that," said Archie. "I don't know anything certain about it, and it may be neither. Who is the other one?"

"Miss Richardson," Niel returned.

Archie gave an involuntary start, which was not noticed, however, by Niel, and his face clouded.

"Miss Richardson!" he repeated, his thoughts seemingly abstracted.

"Yes, Miss Richardson," Niel uttered. "Don't you think she would suit me as well as Miss Pierpoint?"

"I dare say she would," Archie said, slowly.

## II.

THE day upon which the excursion of which Miss Richardson had spoken was to occur, came. Quite early in the day a gay party repaired to Beach Grove, fully prepared to enjoy themselves. The river near which Beach Grove was situated was not a very large one.

The party had a couple of sets of croquet, a half dozen baskets of various dainties for lunch, and a stage had been erected in the shadiest part of the grove for dancing. Everything, even to an unclouded sky, seemed propitious for a pleasant time.

The hours passed. The party took lunch. That over, nearly all of them started off in various directions for a ramble through the grove. Miss Pierpoint and Mr. Clayton, and Miss Moreland and Mr. Durant happened to go together. On they went, going first in one direction and then another, so that they were never very far from where they had started. At length they came out close by the river.

"I wonder if there is a boat in which we could take a ride?" cried Minnie Pierpoint.

"There is none in sight," said Archie Clayton, looking up and down along the shore. "But if Mr. Durant will go up the stream, I will go down it, and we will see if we can find one. That is, if you young la-

dies are willing to remain here for a short time."

"O, we are willing," Miss Moreland returned; "but then, if you both go at once, you might get two boats, and that would be one more than we will need."

"Clayton, you remain here with Miss Moreland and Miss Pierpoint," Mr. Durant said, "and I will go on an exploring expedition up the stream. If I don't find a boat within a reasonable distance, I will return, and you can search down along the shore. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly," Archie returned.

Mr. Durant proceeded up along the shore.

"Don't you think my friend Durant is a fine young gentleman?" Archie Clayton said to Miss Moreland, with a mock confidential air.

"Why do you ask that?" Miss Moreland returned, with a slight blush. "I believe that Mr. Durant is generally considered a very clever gentleman."

"I had a motive in asking," Archie said, his manner the same. "I think he would be especially rejoiced to know that a certain Miss Moreland has a good opinion of him. And I believe she has."

"So do I," Minnie Pierpoint put in.

"Well, why shouldn't she have?" Miss Moreland said, coolly enough this time.

"No reason in the world why she should not," Archie continued, with a mischievous smile. "But I have known people to commence by mutually admiring each other, and end in desperately loving each other."

Miss Moreland's blushes returned.

"Excuse me," Archie added; "of course I don't mean to insinuate that there is any probability of—of—Do I, Miss Pierpoint?"

"Isn't that cottage across the river yonder picturesquely situated?" Miss Moreland said. "I—"

"And yonder comes Mr. Durant," Minnie Pierpoint interrupted.

"Where?" Archie asked.

"Around the bend yonder, in a boat. Do you see him?"

"Of course I see him now," Archie answered.

In a few moments Mr. Durant had landed the boat at the shore. The four had just got in when Niel Marsh and Miss Richardson appeared on the bank.

"Can you take us?" Niel cried.

"Yes, certainly," Mr. Durant answered.

Niel and Miss Richardson were soon in the boat with the others. Mr. Durant and Archie Clayton took the oars.

"Shall we go up or down first?" Mr. Durant asked.

Minnie Pierpoint had some leaves in her hand that she had pulled from a bush on the bank, and which she was pulling to pieces. She held up one of them.

"Whichever way this leaf flies when I drop it, we will go," she said.

She let the leaf go, and it was carried to the lower side of the boat by the air.

"It is down stream," said Niel Marsh.

And they turned the bow of the boat down stream.

"A mile will be far enough to go down," said Miss Moreland, "for you must remember that it will be pretty hard work getting back against the current."

"Not so very hard, Miss Moreland," Mr. Durant returned; "by keeping close to the shore, Clayton and I could soon ascend that distance. If we should get a couple of miles down stream, we can soon get back."

They had been going down stream but a short time when a roaring noise came to their ears.

"What is that?" Miss Richardson asked.

"I presume it is the water rushing over a mill dam," Mr. Durant said.

A few minutes later they discovered this to be true. They came in sight of the place where the mill stood, and where the water was pouring over the dam.

"We will have to go back now," said Miss Moreland.

"To be sure we will," Archie Clayton and Mr. Durant both answered in one breath, turning the bow of the skiff up stream.

"Let's go a little closer," Minnie Pierpoint put in.

"Isn't it dangerous?" Miss Moreland asked.

"We can let the skiff float down gradually," said Archie, "and there will be very little danger. I remember that when I was a boy I used to let my boat go to the very edge of a dam like this, and then pull out of it."

"I've seen that done," Miss Richardson said. "I'm sure I'm not afraid to go closer."

"Shall we do so, Miss Moreland?" Mr. Durant asked.

"I agree to it," Miss Moreland returned.

Keeping the bow of the skiff up stream, they let it drop slowly down. Many times they would try the oars to see that they still had control of it. Presently the thunder of the water rushing over the dam was almost deafening.

"Shall we go back?" shouted Mr. Durant to the girls.

"Yes, yes," they all returned. All of them were pale and beginning to get frightened. Archie and Mr. Durant had full control of the boat, but there was one possibility of danger of which they had not thought. That possibility became a reality.

Archie Clayton gave a more powerful stroke than usual with his oars. One of them snapped off close to the rowlock. Even then Mr. Durant might have pulled out of danger, but the three girls immediately sprang to their feet with screams, shaking the boat so that he could not control it with his oars. Instantly the current took effect on it, the bow whirled down stream, and they rapidly approached the dam.

All that the young men could do was to seize the girls in their arms, there being one for each. They had just time to do this when the boat plunged out over the boiling waters.

\* \* \* \* \*

Six very wet people were out on the shore below the dam. Mr. Durant had caught Miss Moreland in his arms, and had saved her; it had been the same with Archie Clayton and Isabel Richardson; so that there was no choice left to Niel Marsh but to save Minnie Pierpoint. I want you to understand, however, that that last thought is mine and not his. Of course he would as cheerfully save her as either of the other two, for she stood *equally as high in his regard*.

### III.

NIEL MARSH and Archie Clayton were together in the former's room, once more conversing, no doubt, about topics of mutual interest.

"How's that *divided* heart of yours by this time, Niel?" Archie asked.

"About the same, I believe," Niel answered. "I'll tell you the fact: I had a dream last night, and I've concluded to let that dream settle it—that will be as good a way as any."



"My dear friend," Archie said, "in all seriousness I say beware that you do not wreck your happiness. Think of the importance of what you are doing, and remember that only death will sever the bonds into which you will enter. You are a young man, and have plenty of time. I entreat you not to rush hastily into that which may bring you only misery, for marriage without true love can bring you naught else."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Niel, "you are quite a preacher."

"Niel, promise me that you will wait in this matter till your heart decides."

"I wont promise."

"Well, what was your dream?"

"That I was married to Miss Moreland. I am going to do my best to make that dream come true."

Archie Clayton laughed. "Excuse me, Niel," he said, "but I am pretty positive that your dream will not come true. I have been intending to tell you, ever since we commenced talking, that that plunge over the milldam settled the matter for Miss Moreland and Durant, so that you would have to choose between two. Durant told me, a very short time before I came in here, that they are engaged. I have believed for some time that they were in love with each other. I hope a third part of your heart wont be broken by that."

Niel drew a sigh, looked solemn for a moment, and then smiled.

"I do believe it relieves me to hear that," he said. "I was half in hopes she would reject me, anyway. Yes, Archie, I hoped that all but the *right one* would reject me. The one, you know, that I can love in the manner which you express."

"Niel Marsh, you are incorrigible!" Archie cried.

"Which one do you think I can love as a man's wife ought to be loved?" Niel asked, innocently enough; "I mean, of course, which one of the two left?"

"Why, what a question?" Archie exclaimed. "How do I know?"

"I thought that perhaps you might use your judgment," Niel added.

"I beg to be excused from deciding that matter for you," Archie said. "Why, I have never before heard of such an idea! It is preposterous!"

To tell the truth, Archie would have liked to say Miss Pierpoint, for, as you may

have already guessed, dear reader, he loved Miss Richardson himself, never having hinted, even, of his love, however. But he was a young man of honor, and *that* alone would have been sufficient reason for his not advising that somewhat wayward young man, Niel Marsh.

Presently Archie left Niel alone.

"So, so," Niel soliloquized, "it aint to be Clara Moreland. I'll be hanged if I'm a bit sorry that that's turned out the way it has. I remember what Archie said once about his hoping that fate would bring me out all right, or words to that effect, and I suppose that I can take it for granted that Miss Moreland is not to be Mrs. Marsh. I wish fate would decide between the other two, and give me one of them. Miss Richardson or Miss Pierpoint—which one shall I ask to marry me?"

He leaned his head reflectively upon his hand. His thoughts seemed very amusing, but evidently he was in sober earnest in them.

"Let me see," he muttered to himself, "the toss of a leaf the other day seems to have settled Durant's fate; why shall not the toss of the petals of a rose decide mine?"

He rose and walked to a table where stood a vase of flowers. He plucked a rose from among them, and pulled out some of its petals.

"Now I will take these to the south window and throw them out," he continued; "if they are carried to the west, it shall be Miss Richardson; if to the east, Miss Pierpoint. Of course they will be blown one of those two ways alongside of the house."

The window was already up. He went to it and tossed out the petals. It was surely a very whimsical way of deciding a love affair!

But the petals? A gust of wind caught them and carried them toward the west.

"Fate decides that Miss Richardson shall receive my proposition," Niel thought. "Well, so it shall be."

But a pretty face came into his mind—a face that was not Miss Richardson's—and a touch of pain reached his heart.

"Pshaw!" he murmured. "I'd just as soon have Miss Richardson as Minnie. There will be dancing to-night, and I will decide the matter then."

An additional thought occurred to him. "Indeed, I wont break my heart if she

does refuse me," he uttered, in answer to that thought.

Then again Minnie Pierpoint's face floated before his vision. He wondered if he would grieve at all if Miss Richardson should refuse him. He answered that idea, too:

"Why, of course, if I can get Miss Pierpoint afterwards, I will not, for I'd just as soon have her as the other."

The evening came; but for some reason or other Niel Marsh could not get much chance to speak to Miss Richardson. Archie Clayton seemed to be appropriating her. Niel had danced with her once, but Archie had taken her away from him immediately afterward.

At length Niel strolled out of the house for a breath of fresh air. A short distance away, down the avenue, stood a large elm. On one side of this was a rustic bench that would hold one or two persons. Niel found this and placed himself upon it. It was very close against the tree. There was no moon, and the shadows were heavy beneath the overhanging branches.

Niel knew not how long he had been sitting there thinking, when he heard voices close at hand. The first was the voice of Archie Clayton.

"And I was very much afraid you did not love me," it said.

There was a few instants' pause. During those passing moments a flood of strange emotions swept through Niel Marsh's breast. It occurred to him that Archie was speaking to Minnie Pierpoint—it must be she. He was using the language of one who was loved by the person to whom he was speaking. And with these thoughts rushing through his mind, Niel read his own heart at last. *He loved Minnie Pierpoint himself.* A wild pain smote him.

"What a fool I have been all this time!" was his better thought. "I feel that I love her with all my heart, but I have delayed till—"

"But I do love you very much indeed," a voice returned in answer to what Archie Clayton had said.

Niel's heart gave a great bound of joy, for it was the voice of Isabel Richardson to which he was listening.

The couple went out of hearing.

"O my folly! my folly!" Niel murmured; "I have been intending to ask *her* to marry me!"

He arose and started toward the house. He had nearly reached it when he almost ran against a female figure.

"I beg pardon!" he exclaimed.

"Granted," said a musical voice—that of Minnie Pierpoint. She was alone.

"I have been sitting under the great elm," Niel said to her, quickly, "and I want you to go back, for I have something to say to you. Will you?"

They went back together. Niel felt his heart sinking. The question that generally troubles a young man on such occasions came to him. What if she should refuse him? The possibility of that was painful to think of. But he did not delay.

"I have made a discovery this evening, Minnie," he said. "It is that I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Miss Minnie knew her mind and heart upon that subject already. She stole her hand timidly into Niel's.

"Yes, I will be your wife," she murmured, "for I love you."

Dear reader, three weddings occurred shortly after that; and though Niel had never loved anybody but his pretty little Minnie, am I not correct in writing of him, **NO CHOICE LEFT?**